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The Man who Ate the Popomack

By W. J. Turner

Poetry

NEW POEMS
MARIGOLD
THE SEVEN DAYS OF THE SUN
LANDSCAPE OF CYTHEREA
IN TIME LIKE GLASS
PARIS AND HELEN
THE DARK FIRE
THE HUNTER

Prose

THE AESTHETES
BEETHOVEN
ORPHEUS
MUSICAL MEANDERINGS
VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF MUSIC
MUSIC AND LIFE

Drama

SMARAGDA'S LOVER

THE MAN WHO ATE THE POPOMACK

A Tragi-Comedy of Love in Two Acts

By

W. J. TURNER

LONDON
Chatto & Windus
1929

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To

MR. AND MRS. GEOFFREY WHITWORTH

who were responsible

for the first production of this play

Note

It is my belief that the dramatic principles inculcated by all writers on the theatre have only a narrow, logical foundation, and that, like the rules of harmony and musical form with which unmusical professors have always tried to throttle creative musicians, they are æsthetically worthless. I also wish to add that actors must not think that the art of acting—unlike every other art—has already reached perfection. I prophesy that ranges of expression will be developed of which the average European or American actor has no conception—although, as with many new things, the first beginnings of this new art may be traced back in the past, as far as the fifteenth century in Japan and, possibly, further elsewhere. I expect from the actors who take part in this play a freedom of expression beyond what they are used to give in the ordinary realistic play of our time. There should be one interval only, between the first and second Acts, and no delay between the scenes.

W. J. T.

This play was first published by Basil Blackwell Oxford for the British Drama League in 1922, and was first performed at the Savoy Theatre, London, June 12th, 1922, with the following cast:

Man-about-Town	J. Smith-Wright
Old Man	Wilfrid Walter
A Woman	Margot Sieveking
A Man	Alistair Wright
First Young Man	Percival Clark
Second Young Man	Reginald Denham
Muriel Raub	Isabel Jeans
Lord Belvoir	Herbert Marshall
Parlourmaid	Honor Bright
The Lady Olivia	Jean Cadell
Sir Solomon Raub	Frank Royde
Lady Phaoron	Ethel Coleridge
Sir Philo Phaoron	Hay Petrie
Harringham	Alan Trotter
Nosegay	Leo Carroll
Hon. Rupert Clavelly	Arthur Vezin
Captain Anthony	Wilfrid Walter
Mandarin	George Hayes
First Chinaman	Leo Carroll
Second Chinaman	Alfred Clark
Chinese Girl	Gillian Lind

The play produced by Reginald Denham. *Setting by* William Nicholson.

On November 29th, 1926, the revised form, which is here first printed, was produced for the first time at the Cambridge Festival Theatre, with the following cast:

Man-about-Town	Arthur Jeffress
Old Man	T. G. Saville
A Woman	Phyllis Carleton
A Man	Norman Marshall
First Young Man	Hedley Briggs
Second Young Man	Francis Waddell
Muriel Raub	Doria Paston
Lord Belvoir	Maurice Evans
Parlourmaid	Pauline Graham
The Lady Olivia	Rita Daniel
Sir Solomon Raub	John Thatcher
Lady Phaoron	Peggy Calthrop
Sir Philo Phaoron	Rodney Millington
Mandarin	C. Harold Ridge
First Chinaman	Hedley Briggs
Second Chinaman	Francis Waddell
Nosegay	Michael Hampton
Hon. Rupert Clavelly	Arthur Jeffress
Captain Anthony	T. G. Saville

The play produced by Herbert M. Prentice. *Setting by* Terence Gray.

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MAN-ABOUT-TOWN.

OLD MAN.

A WOMAN.

A MAN.

FIRST YOUNG MAN.

SECOND YOUNG MAN.

MURIEL RAUB.

LORD BELVOIR.

PARLOURMAID.

THE LADY OLIVIA RAUB.

SIR SOLOMON RAUB, *millionaire Jewish financier, head of Raub Bros., China and East India merchants.*

LADY PHAORON, *a woman of fifty, wife of Sir Philo.*

SIR PHILO PHAORON, *famous Egyptologist, small, and about 60-65.*

MANDARIN
FIRST CHINAMAN
SECOND CHINAMAN
} *These characters wear masks.*

HARRINGHAM, *butler to Sir Solomon Raub.*

NOSEGAY, *valet to Lord Belvoir, a simple, stolid fellow of 28.*

HON. RUPERT CLAVELLY.

CAPTAIN ANTHONY, *a creation of Belvoir's imagination, made up exactly to resemble the Old Man of Act I, but with a white beard.*

THE MAN WHO ATE THE POPOMACK

Act I

SCENE I

SCENE. *A room on a Saturday morning at a London Picture Gallery. There is an ottoman facing a picture on a side wall, its end facing the audience. A man about middle-age, well groomed, enters. He looks at a still-life of a large, round, blue object, and then at his catalogue.*

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Now what can that be?
[*An old man enters, his clothes of beautifully soft material, but hanging loosely about him. He stares at the same picture.*]
What's the catalogue say? . . . Humph! . . . "Portrait of a Balloon." [*To* O.M.] "Portrait of a Balloon."—Can you see the point of that, sir?

OLD MAN. A balloon hasn't any points.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. But why paint a balloon?

OLD MAN. Why paint anything?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Exactly, why paint anything unless it's beautiful? Now there's that Epstein-Hudson memorial . . . disgraceful . . . it's a monstrosity, and why call it *Rima?* I knew

Hudson, a charming man, gentle, courteous to ladies, sensitive to all the beauties of nature. How he would have suffered if he had known that he would one day be the cause of polluting the beautiful green mansions of Hyde Park with a libel on the female form!

OLD MAN. You cannot libel the female form.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. I hate this modern fantastic stuff; it's morbid.

OLD MAN. It's the work of young men who cannot control their feelings.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Exactly; they might as well print their family secrets on the outside of their houses to amuse the milkman and the butcher-boy.

OLD MAN. Are you the milkman?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN [*taken aback*]. What do you mean?

OLD MAN. I am the butcher-boy, yes, I am the butcher-boy.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. I don't understand you.

OLD MAN. I am a critic. I came here to slaughter these so-called artists, and as a butcher I tell you they make very poor meat.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN [*interested*]. Really! You are a critic, and what is your honest opinion of modern art?

OLD MAN. Modern art has always been bad.

MAN-ABOUT TOWN [*chuckling*]. Ha, ha! Excellent! Splendid!

OLD MAN. But it is always more interesting than ancient art. You, sir, go to every exhibition?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Almost all.

OLD MAN. How often do you go to the National Gallery?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Whenever I hear of some interesting addition.

OLD MAN. Yes, the National Gallery is visited only by tourists.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. You don't say so!

OLD MAN. It is so calm there; they are glad to get out of the traffic.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Of course there is something stimulating about this modern stuff, I must say.

OLD MAN. As a milkman, would you call at an empty house to read what was chalked upon the door?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. I don't see what you mean.

OLD MAN. Most modern paintings are mere chalk-marks on the door, but the house is inhabited, that makes all the difference. There is a human being inside. Have you ever travelled in the desert?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. No.

OLD MAN. Well, when you travel in the desert, and you have been hundreds of miles without meeting a soul and you come to some great stone tomb beautifully carved. and alongside it is a miserable mud and willow hut, you find that you take no notice of the tomb but go eagerly

up to the hut, for it may be inhabited. Well, that is why people look at modern pictures; we are really looking for the man who painted them, and if we heard that he was dead we should pass on to the next.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. That's very interesting. I never thought of that, but I believe . . .

[*They pass out of sight. The room is empty. Presently a fashionably-dressed couple enter. They stop before the same picture.*]

THE WOMAN. That's rather striking!

THE MAN. I suppose it is—queer, though, isn't it?

THE WOMAN. What does the catalogue say?

THE MAN. It says "Portrait of a Balloon."

THE WOMAN. Whose is it?

THE MAN. Oliver Bath—ever heard of him?

THE WOMAN [*interested*]. Oliver Bath.

THE MAN. I see he's dead; he died last year.

THE WOMAN [*her interest evaporating*]. Oh!

[*She turns away and they pass on out of sight. The room is again empty. Presently two young men enter.*]

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*with a gesture round the room*]. Why are all these things painted? What does it mean?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Poor devils, they are unhappy in love!

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Unhappy?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Well, dissatisfied.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Do you mean dissatisfied with Nature?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Why yes. Aren't they always painting the same nudes over and over again?

FIRST YOUNG MAN. I can understand discontent with some of *them*. But does one never work from happiness?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Men who are either happy or unhappy are not artists.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. You must be one or the other if you are human.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Artists are not human. Look at this fellow now [*pointing to a picture*]. Isn't he just too human? . . . That landscape is good because it hasn't any cows in it.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. But what about this . . . "Portrait of a Balloon"?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. That's superb! God, how good!

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Do you really think so?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Of course. What marvellous colour! I've never seen such a blue . . . and what ecstasy, what voluptuousness! What fatal perfection!

FIRST YOUNG MAN. But why is it called "Portrait of a Balloon"?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. To attract children. I sympathise with the artist. Who is he? Never mind, don't tell me. I'm not a dealer or a collector.

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*looking at catalogue*]. I see the painter is dead.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Excellent! Does it say what he died of? But of course not. These catalogues never tell you anything. No doubt another case of ascensionitis.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. What's that?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Balloon in the head. All good artists suffer from it.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. I wish I understood painting, but I obviously don't.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Not obviously.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. What I should like to get at is the motive behind painting. Why paint at all?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Why marry, why become a bus-conductor, a taxi-driver, a politician or even an art-critic? Why make motor-cars, silk pyjamas, or oatmeal soap? It's all equally unnatural, but then it is unnatural to have pyjamas and, above all, it's unnatural to have feelings. No cow is unhappy, no tree is miserable, and a stone probably doesn't even feel the cold. Simple feelings make simple acts; when men's feelings get too complicated they paint. Painting is a highly complicated act . . .

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Art is action?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Yes, accidental action . . . the accident was the meeting of the artist's father and mother. Life is full of little accidents . . . and some of them are masterpieces.

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*pointing to the pictures*]. And what would you call these?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Carefully planned mistakes. [*They pass out into the adjoining room of the Picture Gallery. Enter* LORD BELVOIR *and* MURIEL RAUB.]

LORD BELVOIR. Let's sit down. [*They sit down opposite the same picture.*] When I first saw you I felt that I was looking at some far-away, foreign country. It is a country uninhabited but full of passion where the mountains hang over the streams as if they were the invisible silence which surrounds the world charmed into huge blocks of stone by those toneless voices falling into the abyss of time. Like those mountains whose melancholy is carved from the air I sat listening to your voice which seemed to come up very small and faint to reassure me that there was life there, and when I heard it I felt as though I were sitting by a fountain of extraordinary and inexhaustible joy.

MURIEL. How romantic you are! One would not think it was mid-day but after midnight, and that we were sitting out a dance.

LORD BELVOIR [*vexed*]. I never feel like this at dances. If I like my partner I simply kiss her.

MURIEL. Really! And does she let you?

LORD BELVOIR. Why not? What else is there to do?

MURIEL [*ironically*]. How nice to have someone so practical! What a charming partner you must be.

LORD BELVOIR. Have you never been kissed at a dance?

MURIEL. If it is a custom, I suppose I must have been. I've never really noticed.

LORD BELVOIR. Really, you are a maddening little devil!

MURIEL. Only a moment ago I was a voice from —I forget where, but somewhere deep and wonderful.

LORD BELVOIR. So you are, you're everything, you've taken complete possession of my senses. When I shave I cut myself thinking of you, when I eat I don't notice what I'm eating, I gulp down blindly everything that's put before me. Half the time I simply don't know what I'm doing, for I'm thinking of you, of when I last saw you, of when I shall see you again. Muriel, I adore you, I cannot live without you, I . . .

MURIEL [*putting her hand softly upon his mouth*]. Ssh!

[*The* MAN-ABOUT-TOWN *and the* OLD MAN *re-enter.*]

OLD MAN [*taking no notice of the couple*]. Of all the follies of which mankind is capable, love is the most absurd!

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN [*impressed*]. Really! Is that your serious opinion?

OLD MAN. No, sir, it is not my serious opinion. I have no serious opinions. I gave them up long ago.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Still, you think love is absurd.

OLD MAN. It is absurd, because it is never reciprocated. The poets tell us of couples who have loved equally—couples long ago in the prehistoric past, but no one has ever met such couples. Love is like hunger: whoever heard of a reciprocated hunger? You might as well expect a mutton chop to desire to be eaten!

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. That's a novel idea. I must say it never occurred to me before.

OLD MAN. It wouldn't, sir. Ideas don't occur to people in this country. The question in every love-affair is which is the mutton chop? [*He suddenly sees the couple on the settee and stares abstractedly at them for the moment. Then he turns and repeats aloud*] Which is the mutton chop?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN [*embarrassed*]. Well, what is your opinion, sir, of this show as a whole?

OLD MAN. My opinion, sir, is that they are all mutton chops; never a spark of life among them—except that fellow! [*He points to the picture.*]

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Then what do you think is the reason of the low level of modern art?

OLD MAN. The reason, sir, is that Nature produces too many fools.

[*They move away and slowly go out.* LORD BELVOIR *and* MURIEL *wait until their footsteps are out of hearing.*]

MURIEL. Now go on!

LORD BELVOIR. What was I saying?

MURIEL. You were making love to me.

LORD BELVOIR. Was I? I didn't know it.

MURIEL [*teasingly*]. Do you mean to say you weren't going to make love to me after all that preparation?

LORD BELVOIR. What preparation? Do be serious, Muriel. I love you, I adore you; it is impossible for me to say what you mean to me.
[*He takes one of her hands.*]

MURIEL [*mischievously*]. Are you going to propose again?

LORD BELVOIR [*throwing aside her hand*]. Damn it, Muriel, you really are heartless! You don't care a rap!

MURIEL [*smiling at him*]. Perhaps I don't to-day, but you haven't yet asked me!

LORD BELVOIR [*moodily*]. Do you need to be asked? Did you ever ask me? I love you! I can't help loving you! I go about all day with your name shut on my lips, I am always frightened it will be heard when I open them to speak. When I am in the country, absolutely alone, I can then say your name aloud, in the stillness among the hedges and the clouds.

MURIEL [*softly*]. But don't you want to know whether I love you?

LORD BELVOIR [*passionately*]. Muriel! My darling! Do you?

MURIEL [*teasing him*]. Well, I have said I'd marry you, so perhaps I do. You're a good match.

LORD BELVOIR [*rising*]. Really, Muriel, I can't stand hearing you talk like that.

MURIEL. I never said I didn't love you.

LORD BELVOIR. Well, do you?

MURIEL. It's possible.

LORD BELVOIR. Possible be damned! Muriel, do you or do you not love me?

MURIEL. I don't dislike you.

LORD BELVOIR. My God! You really are impossible!

MURIEL [*provokingly*]. Well, why have anything to do with me? I didn't ask you to love me.

LORD BELVOIR. How can I help it when I look at you? You shouldn't let me see you. You are a cold-blooded devil: I am going to leave you!

MURIEL. Very well.

LORD BELVOIR [*despairingly*]. Muriel, you don't mean it?

MURIEL. Mean what?

LORD BELVOIR [*slowly*]. I am going to ask you once more. Muriel, do you love me or not? If you don't answer me, I shall go, and you'll never see me again.

MURIEL. How absurd! I shan't answer.

LORD BELVOIR [*rising*]. Very well, I'm going.

MURIEL [*taking his arm and drawing him to her, softly*]. Kiss me!

LORD BELVOIR. Muriel! [*They embrace passionately.*]

LORD BELVOIR [*after a few moments, pointing at the picture*]. Don't you think that still-life is rather good?

MURIEL. What is it? [*Looks at catalogue*] "Portrait of a Balloon" . . . How funny! But it's a lovely colour.

LORD BELVOIR. It's exquisite, like some exotic fruit.

MURIEL. Oh, that reminds me! I promised father I'd ring up; he is to let me know if the Popomack has arrived.

LORD BELVOIR. Don't bother now. What does it matter?

MURIEL. But I must. Everybody's expecting it to-night. And if it hasn't come we must arrange to have something else.

LORD BELVOIR. What a fuss about a fruit.

MURIEL. Darling, you don't understand what a rarity it is, and it's in our honour. You sit there, I shan't be two minutes. You've not looked at anything yet. Stay there and look at your still-life.

LORD BELVOIR. I'm going to buy it. Send the attendant in if you see him.

MURIEL. What extravagance! But I shall buy it for you. Would you really like it?

LORD BELVOIR. Darling!

[*Re-enter the two young men, who glance at the "Portrait of a Balloon" again, and then go out.*]

MURIEL. I shan't be two minutes.

[*She goes out. The room is empty for a few moments except for* LORD BELVOIR, *who sits quite still looking at the picture. Presently an attendant comes in, goes up to the picture and affixes in its corner on the glass the little red seal signifying that the picture is sold. After a glance at* LORD BELVOIR, *who does not move, he goes out.*]

Curtain

Act I

SCENE II

SCENE. *The drawing-room of* Sir Solomon Raub's *town house in Charles Street, Mayfair. Folding doors L. to music-room and door R. Parlourmaid enters through folding doors carrying a large spray of roses, passes through the room and goes to glass over the mantelpiece, where she pins the roses in her dress, and goes out R. Shortly afterwards* The Lady Olivia *enters, followed by* Muriel. The Lady Olivia *goes to settee near fire and sits down.*

Muriel [*as she enters*]. Roses! how beautifully they smell!

The Lady Olivia. What roses, Muriel? There are none here.

Muriel. There must have been. I can smell them.

The Lady Olivia. You are always smelling things that no one else can [*peevishly*]. It is a shocking habit, and very bad manners. [*Holding her bottle of smelling salts to her nose*] I can smell nothing.

Muriel. You never can smell anything, mother.

The Lady Olivia. Muriel! You are positively disgusting! Why should one smell? In any decent house the sense of smell is unnecessary.

Muriel. I get great pleasure from my sense of smell.

THE LADY OLIVIA [*with a slight shudder*]. Really, Muriel! Is smell a sense?

MURIEL. Of course it is—one of the five senses.

THE LADY OLIVIA. Well, four is too many for a woman of breeding; why should you try to cultivate a fifth? It can only lead you into more mischief.

MURIEL [*coldly*]. Mischief! Whatever do you mean?

THE LADY OLIVIA. Should I ever have married your father if I had not been carried away by my four senses? Heaven knows whom I'd have married if I'd had a fifth!

MURIEL. Someone still better.

THE LADY OLIVIA. Don't underrate your father. It's probably from him you get this wonderful sense of smell. When I first knew him he was always complaining that the English never wash. That's why he loathed going where there would be crowds. I had the greatest difficulty in getting him to take me to the Court balls at Buckingham Palace, but I used to say "it's a penalty you pay for being a foreigner. It's not that they don't wash: it's that they're English. If you were an Englishman, you wouldn't notice it, for you would be the same yourself."

MURIEL. I think he is quite right. I have noticed it myself.

THE LADY OLIVIA. Yes, because you are only half-English; and what I say is, what is the good of

your sense of smell? It's only an annoyance. The best thing you can do with it is to lose it. There! I've said something that I am sure is in the Bible!

[*Enter* SIR SOLOMON RAUB *with* LADY PHAORON *who never rises with the ladies, but always stays and smokes a very strong cigar and drinks several glasses of port with the men; after them follows* LORD BELVOIR *and* SIR PHILO PHAORON.]

LADY PHAORON. I hope you don't mind if I smoke a pipe, Lady Olivia?

[MURIEL *makes a wry grimace.*]

THE LADY OLIVIA. Oh dear no, not in the least, dear Lady Phaoron. I never smell anything.

LADY PHAORON [*throwing a half-smoked cigar into the fire and taking out a pipe*]. The cigars one gets now since they put the extra duty on are so unsatisfying.

SIR SOLOMON [*who is smoking one*]. Like most European products they are for tired business men, not for connoisseurs, dear lady.

SIR PHILO. In ancient Egypt, women did not smoke [*dreamily, as if slowly tasting the comfort of it*]. In fact, they did not eat with the men, but had their meals in their own apartments.

LORD BELVOIR. Was there any special reason for that?

SIR PHILO. No special reason, Lord Belvoir, but it was an ancient custom; and I venture to think originally an æsthetic one.

MURIEL. Do you mean that they idealised women and could not bear to see them feeding like animals?

LADY PHAORON. The question is, could the women bear to see the men eating?

THE LADY OLIVIA. So long as they all ate together, my dear, I don't see that it would matter. I've often thought that the soup course is only tolerable because we all do it simultaneously. As my mother always used to say to us girls in the nursery, "Keep together! Don't get scattered!"

SIR SOLOMON. Well, I wonder if the ancient Egyptians ever ate the fruit we are going to have to-night.

SIR PHILO. Oh, is it something special?

SIR SOLOMON. It is, I believe, the rarest and most delicious fruit in the world and totally unknown in Europe.

LORD BELVOIR. What is it called?

SIR SOLOMON. It is called the popomack.

SIR PHILO. What does it taste like?

SIR SOLOMON. Well, I don't know. There are, I understand, very few people in the world that do know.

SIR PHILO. But how do you know it's edible at all?

SIR SOLOMON. It has been celebrated as a great delicacy throughout the East from ancient times. I believe Marco Polo refers to it somewhere.

LORD BELVOIR. Where, may I ask, did you get it?

SIR SOLOMON. Well, perhaps I had better tell you all about it. Years ago, when I was in Canton on a business visit to our house there, I was invited to a banquet by Fu-Chi-li, the governor of the province, who was a Mandarin of very high rank. He had been a friend of Li Hung Chang's and was immensely rich. In his day he had taken an active part in politics, and had experienced many vicissitudes of fortune. During some temporary reverse, it was my father's privilege and good luck to render him a considerable service, which he repaid a hundredfold, while still, as is the custom in the East, considering himself not only my father's debtor, but after his death his son's also. Well, days before the banquet, I realised that something very special was going to happen; in fact, one might have said without exaggeration that the whole town buzzed of it. When the eventful evening came, I found that I had been extraordinarily honoured. There were only two other guests, both Chinese of high rank. We had a repast, such as it is impossible to describe.

MURIEL. How did you talk to them?

SIR SOLOMON. Oh, they spoke perfect English, but [*knitting his brows*] I can't remember what we talked about. Towards the end of an excellent dinner, Fu-Chi-li rose and struck a

small silver gong. And here I will follow his example and call Harringham. [*He goes to the gong and strikes it. The lights immediately go out, and they go up again upon the interior of a Mandarin's house in China. Seated round a table are three Chinese and an Englishman. The host, a Mandarin of high rank, has a gong beside him. The remnants of a repast not yet quite completed are on the table. There are no servants in the room.*]

MANDARIN. I do not understand the Western ideas of love, I have been reading an English novel called *Maurice Guest*, in which the young man Maurice loves a woman who does not love him. How is that possible?

ENGLISHMAN. It is not only possible; it is the custom. Oscar Wilde would have said it was the only form of real love known to man.

MANDARIN. Ah, Oscar Wilde. I have read him. He is another symptom of your disease.

ENGLISHMAN. You think that the West is diseased?

MANDARIN. In everything you are looking for something else. That is your disease. Here, when a man wants a woman, he takes a woman —any man and any woman, it is all the same. What difference can there be? You take a woman and you look at her. You look at her hair, her eyes, her mouth, her limbs—all sound; and yet you are doubtful; you look again. What are you looking for? You do not know. Well, perhaps you go away; perhaps

you sleep with her or, as you say, marry. Well, you embrace her, you enjoy her; but as you lie beside her during the night gazing at the ceiling which you cannot see, you ask yourself: "Is that all?" No one answers you. You get more and more bitter, and you say to yourself, lying there: "My God, this is impossible!" But it is you who are impossible. You have had your pleasure, and yet you are not satisfied.

FIRST CHINAMAN. They call it "divine discontent."

ENGLISHMAN. I am a Jew, and I understand you. To my father, unfaithfulness would have been impossible. The idea would have been monstrous to him. He had his own woman; any other would have been superfluous and meaningless. But [*reflectively*] I am not like that.

MANDARIN. You were born among these people, and you have become contaminated.

ENGLISHMAN. I found an English woman who attracted me more than any woman of my own race. Why was that?

MANDARIN. I do not believe there was any difference. She was probably less accessible socially, and your desire for her was the desire to overcome resistance. Evidently you have not got her. When you do, you will find she is just the same as the others.

ENGLISHMAN. I mean to marry her. To me she is more desirable.

MANDARIN. Yes, you too have got the disease. When you have her, you will wonder what you saw in her, and you will think simply that you have made a mistake, and will spend your life looking in other women everywhere for what has never existed.

ENGLISHMAN. But these Western races are more subtle in love than we are. You can see it in their poetry and music. No pure Jew has ever been a first-rate creative artist.

FIRST CHINAMAN. All Europeans have confused minds. They look at an eyebrow, and they get an exquisite sensation. Then they embrace the woman with the eyebrow, and they get another sensation, also exquisite; but with this sensation they have lost the other. The eyebrow is now merely an eyebrow, and they are vexed. But why cannot they embrace one woman, and look at the eyebrow of another?

ENGLISHMAN. Well, I understand it. When you look at anything very beautiful, you cannot bear the thought that presently it will be gone, and gone perhaps for ever. So you desire to possess it, to fasten it to you, so that it will always be there for you to look at.

MANDARIN. Fu-Chi-Wang bought a beautiful lacquer screen; for a few days he saw it; for a few months his friends saw it; and now it is seen only by strangers. Fu-Chi-Wang does not know it is there.

ENGLISHMAN. He would miss it if it were taken away.

MANDARIN. Yes, his eye would come to life again.

ENGLISHMAN. Well, that is what I say about women. How can one stick to one woman as my father did without one's senses becoming dulled and blunted?

MANDARIN. It is not the same thing. When you are thirsty, water will always quench your thirst. You want thirst to be provoked, you want to be always thirsty. Water will not make you thirsty, nor does a wife awaken desire. Mistresses, like alcohol, tickle the palate without satisfying the appetite, and in the end destroy both.

ENGLISHMAN. But if you were always surrounded with water, you would never get thirsty.

MANDARIN. You soon get thirsty if you are not always drinking.

ENGLISHMAN. But in Europe when one mixes much with other women, one is always being attracted. To me every woman is unique: I should like to know them all. It is a pity there is not time enough.

MANDARIN. Fatal illusion! Each seems unique because there are many, since each is in a different relation to you. But it is the relationship which is unique. A yellow rose is like a woman in a yellow dress, and a red rose is like a

woman in a red dress, but it is only a difference in dress, or in shape, or in size, or in voice, or in colour.

FIRST CHINAMAN. You cannot embrace a colour or a voice, and does it matter whether what you embrace is big or little? Perhaps your wife has wit, but you cannot sleep with her wit.

ENGLISHMAN. But these qualities awaken desire.

MANDARIN. Only in fools. The wise man loves to hear a beautiful voice, to see a beautiful colour. A voice is to be heard, not to be bought and put in a bed, and colour is to be seen, not hidden in the dark. But few men, and least of all Europeans, can enjoy with their eyes and their ears; yet there is no other way of enjoying colour and sound, and the body cannot rape the mind. [*Silence: then turning to the* SECOND CHINAMAN *who has not spoken*] But you who are wiser than all of us have said nothing. Let us hear your opinion.

SECOND CHINAMAN. I think we are wiser, but I do not think we are right.

MANDARIN. What! You agree with the Europeans?

SECOND CHINAMAN. The finest types in the West are fastidious in love to a degree we should think ridiculous, but I discovered that they do not thereby lose virility. They are more, not less, passionate than coarser men, and both

bolder and more subtle. They live more intensely and more deeply because their bodies are more conscious.

ENGLISHMAN. Do you, then, believe there is such a thing as love?

SECOND CHINAMAN. I do not know that perfect love may not be enjoyed by man. In China, we try to separate our consciousness from our body. We give our body to women with less thought than we give it to the table, and our consciousness we keep for our friends. But there is no harmony in such a life. Our mind and our body should be one. We despise the man who eats grossly because he does not know what he eats. Shall we call it love when men live with women they do not know?

MANDARIN. But it is just because we do not know them that they are desirable.

SECOND CHINAMAN. The body and the spirit are one, but as the stone is less conscious than the tree, and the tree than the man, so one man is less conscious than another. Stones and trees love, for stones and trees live, but we do not call it "love" since it is not full and conscious enough. Neither is lust full and conscious enough for that man who desires to live more and more richly, and such a man will inevitably turn away from it.

ENGLISHMAN. Then you believe that a man should sow his wild oats?

SECOND CHINAMAN. I believe that the man who fears nothing and lives will live according to the power that is within him. If it is a small power, he will satisfy it easily—whether with one woman or fifty is immaterial.

ENGLISHMAN. But what becomes of morals?

SECOND CHINAMAN. There is only one moral law which a man can break, and that is to be satisfied with less than his soul demands. Does it matter how many he breaks it with?

MANDARIN. Cannot the eye look with pleasure on a beautiful girl without wanting her as a mistress?

SECOND CHINAMAN. It is unknown what the soul craves for, but when a girl is beautiful we mean that our soul is suddenly more alive. This feeling of life is so exquisite, that we seize her greedily in the hope of more, and our life is as suddenly extinguished. Man must find out how to live. There is no receipt, although your churches pretend to give you one.

ENGLISHMAN. Do you believe in marriage as an institution?

SECOND CHINAMAN. Does a boatman believe in oars? Yes, until he is given sails. Does he then believe in sails? Yes, until he finds he can go easier and further with steam. Marriage has nothing to do with love.

ENGLISHMAN. Then do you not think that a man should be faithful to his wife?

SECOND CHINAMAN. To embrace a woman because she is your wife is like embracing her because she is your mother.

ENGLISHMAN. I do not understand you.

SECOND CHINAMAN. I mean that mere affection should not drive you further than a mere affectionate embrace. To sleep with your wife when you are merely fond of her is a sin against love. To sleep with a woman whom you merely lust after is also a sin against love. In Europe both these habits are extremely popular.

MANDARIN. I understand you. You mean that they are different symptoms of the same disharmony.

SECOND CHINAMAN. The fruits of such unions are ugly in body and dull in mind. I remember standing at your Charing Cross station watching the streams of young men and women going to business, and they looked like herds of disgusting animals. Mongrels, bred not from harmonious passion, but by accident! Naturally they mostly hate their parents.

ENGLISHMAN. Then the Western religious bodies are wrong in preaching faithfulness?

SECOND CHINAMAN. Physical union without passion is a sin against life. Lovers who live together after their passion has died are disgusting to the gods and obviously blunted in mind and body. There may be passions so harmonious that they endure throughout the

lovers' physical life; that is the only faithfulness.

MANDARIN. I do not believe that love is anything more than a pleasure like eating and drinking. One likes some women more than others as one likes some foods more than others, but too much of any one of them will take away the appetite.

SECOND CHINAMAN [*ironically*]. In the beloved there is an infinity of life. The lover who has just left her for ever is carrying away on his sleeve a single hair.

FIRST CHINAMAN. One is quite enough, all the others are the same.

MANDARIN. I doubt the reality of this ideal Western love. It is too much of an abstraction. I should like to see it tested.

ENGLISHMAN. Well, if I couldn't have one woman I'd have another. Of course I might prefer the one I hadn't got.

MANDARIN. Only because you hadn't got her . . . all else is illusion. It's the unknown that attracts us. [*With a gesture as if concluding the argument*] If the popomack were as common as the pineapple we should not make such a fuss about it, but as we know that we shall be accounted happy if we taste it once in our lives, it means a great deal more to us.

ENGLISHMAN. Have you never tasted it?

MANDARIN. Never. I remember my father telling

me that when he was a young man the Governor of his province had one, and held a great feast to eat it.

ENGLISHMAN. I feel deeply sensible of the great honour you have done me in inviting me to-night to partake of this popomack. I am most curious to see it.

MANDARIN. Well, my friends, the time has come for us to enjoy the most exquisite delicacy known to man.

[*He strikes the gong, which reverberates slowly through the silence.*]

[*The lights go out as a servant enters, and the scene is as before, with* SIR SOLOMON RAUB *standing by the side of the gong which is still stirring from the blow he has given it. The door opens and* HARRINGHAM *enters.*]

SIR SOLOMON. Bring in the popomack! [*He turns to the guests*] No doubt these were the very words Fu-Chi-li used to his servant, who, however, returned rushing into the room, white with terror, and falling prostrate, muttered something in Chinese at which the others started in astonishment. Even Fu-Chi-li was, I saw, visibly disconcerted, in spite of his extraordinary self-control. But almost immediately he was the urbane host again, and, dismissing the servant, he explained to us with many apologies that some unforeseen and altogether extraordinary circumstance had pre-

vented his placing before us the unique dish with which he had wished to honour our presence. In spite of his exterior calm, the tone of his voice betrayed an emotion incompatible with any ordinary feeling of disappointment, but the other guests remained curiously impassive. I did not like to ask any questions, and when we parted later, after a stay somewhat briefer than usual, nothing further had been said.

LORD BELVOIR. And did you never learn what had happened?

SIR SOLOMON. Never!

SIR PHILO. But how did you know that he was going to give you a popomack?

THE LADY OLIVIA. And what is a popomack? You have never told us that.

SIR SOLOMON. Well, when I told Furse, the manager of our Canton branch, what had happened, he said that Fu-Chi-li must have been going to give us a popomack; in fact he had heard rumours of it. Furse was a man of about fifty, the son of a Chinese missionary, and born in China, and an absolute mine of out-of-the-way knowledge. He told me that every now and then, say once in fifty, or once in a hundred or even a couple of hundred years, a single popomack fruit turns up somewhere in the East, and that the knowledge of its existence spreads with extraordinary rapidity

and causes the greatest excitement. There is tremendous competition to procure it, but all negotiations are mysteriously elaborate and secret; for the life of any man known to possess it would not be worth a string of cash. Specimens that have turned up in the past have usually found their way to the Emperor or to some high Mandarin.

LORD BELVOIR. Had Furse ever seen one?

SIR SOLOMON. No, nor ever heard of the existence of one before.

[HARRINGHAM *enters, carrying on a silver platter what looks like a huge blue orange; it has the shape of an orange, but the hard rind of a passion fruit or a pomegranate, and is as large as a good-sized melon and a vivid bright blue. They all gaze at it as* HARRINGHAM *places it on the table with a knife and a number of plates. He then goes out.*]

MURIEL. What a lovely colour!

LADY PHAORON. I hope it won't give us indigestion.

SIR PHILO. So that's a popomack! Extraordinary! Do you know, I believe it may be the strange fruit mentioned at the banquet of Amenophis IV of the XVIIIth Dynasty about 1500 B.C. The reference to it has never been understood.

SIR SOLOMON. What does it say about it?

SIR PHILO. The passage is obscure. All I remember is that it mentions its colour as being re-

markable, and there was something else strange about it, but I have forgotten.

LORD BELVOIR. May I ask how you came to get it?

SIR SOLOMON. Furse sent it to me from Canton; it arrived two days ago. It was a piece of extraordinary luck, and is really a remarkable story, which I must tell you some time. I determined we should have it to-night in honour of your engagement with Muriel. And now I think it is time we cut this rarity. I am very curious to taste it.

LADY PHAORON. I hope it won't give me indigestion.

SIR SOLOMON [*as he takes a knife and proceeds to insert the point*]. Well, I'm sure it would be worth it. The Chinese are great epicureans and would never have made such a fuss about something that was merely ordinarily pleasant. This rind is very tough. [*He makes an effort and succeeds in inserting the point, then pushes the blade down.*] Good God!

ALL [*excitedly*]. What is it?

[*The popomack rolls into two cut halves, and immediately a frightful smell unlike anything they have ever experienced before pervades the room.*]

ALL. Faugh! Ugh! It's appalling! Take it away! It's unbearable!

SIR PHILO [*jumping excitedly, holding his handkerchief to his nose*]. That's it! That's it! I remember now! It smells! *Une odeur épouvantable,*

Lefebure translates it. It's quite correct. It's the real thing! Wonderful! A divine colour, lapis-lazuli blue, and a smell like the plague!

SIR SOLOMON [*who has retreated to a far corner of the room with his handkerchief to his nose*]. Then you don't think there's anything wrong with it?

SIR PHILO. Wrong! Of course not! No, it's absolutely correct. This proves it. [*Almost dancing in his excitement*] Marvellous!

LADY PHAORON [*tartly*]. Marvellous! It's disgusting!

THE LADY OLIVIA [*the only one who has taken no part in the excitement now begins to sniff uneasily and suddenly puts her handkerchief to her nose*]. Oh, my fifth sense! I've found it!

[*She shrieks and immediately faints.* SIR SOLOMON *rings the bell and* HARRINGHAM *enters in his usual imperturbable manner, but suddenly visibly shrinks; he makes an involuntary movement towards his pocket, but recollects himself, and suppresses it with a face fearfully contorted.*]

SIR SOLOMON. Help me to carry your mistress to her room, Harringham. You had better come, too, Muriel. [*To his guests*] Excuse us one moment.

[*Exeunt* SIR SOLOMON *and* HARRINGHAM, *carrying* THE LADY OLIVIA, *followed by* MURIEL.]

SIR PHILO [*his face beaming, at least that part of it which is not covered by his handkerchief*]. This

is really thrilling. I'm going to taste it. [*He cuts a slice of the popomack and begins eating it.*] Ah! heavenly! Come on, Belvoir, you must taste it. [*To* LADY PHAORON] Will you try some, my dear?

LADY PHAORON. Certainly not, I shall go and see if I can be of any use to Olivia. [*Exit.*]

SIR PHILO [*cutting another two slices and beginning a fresh one greedily*]. Here, you must taste it, Belvoir; you can't imagine how delicious it is!

LORD BELVOIR. Well, the smell is pretty awful, but I'll risk it.

SIR PHILO. That's right.

[LORD BELVOIR *begins to eat reluctantly, but his expression at once changes to one of intense satisfaction.*]

LORD BELVOIR. You are quite right; it's really wonderful.

SIR PHILO. Yes, isn't it?

[*The two men go on in silence, eating greedily and cutting more slices until the popomack is more than half gone. Gradually they cease to hold their handkerchiefs to their noses, and by the time* SIR SOLOMON *returns they have put them into their pockets. They are still eating when he returns.*]

SIR PHILO. How's Lady Olivia?

SIR SOLOMON. She's come round, thank you, but she's going to lie down for a bit. This is really awful. I must apologise.

SIR PHILO. Apologise! Not at all! Taste it, it's

wonderful! Heavenly! Isn't it, Belvoir? [LORD BELVOIR *nods, his mouth full.*]

SIR SOLOMON [*hardly concealing his expression of disgust behind his handkerchief which he holds carefully to his nose*]. Faugh! I wouldn't dream of touching the stuff. I can scarcely bear to stay in the room with it.

SIR PHILO. Eat it, and you won't notice the smell; it's just the same with cheese.

SIR SOLOMON. No, thank you! But if you like it do you mind finishing it quickly?

SIR PHILO. Delighted! But I warn you you're missing something, isn't he, Belvoir? and you'll regret it.

[*He cuts the last slice and hands half to* LORD BELVOIR, *after cutting off the rind. The two men eat in silence,* SIR SOLOMON *watching them with a curious expression. Presently he rings for the butler.*]

[*Enter* HARRINGHAM.]

SIR SOLOMON. Take what's left of this away, and burn it!

Curtain

Act I

SCENE III

SCENE. Lord Belvoir's *rooms in Half Moon Street, three months later. Morning. Enter* Nosegay *with a large scent-spray with a rubber grip; he works carefully round the room, spraying curtains, carpet, chairs, chesterfield and cushions. The room has two windows in the back wall, facing the audience and looking on to the street; against the right wall is a Bechstein grand with the stool at the far end, so that sitting at the piano, you have your back to the window wall and look into the room. There are a few gilt upholstered chairs, a chesterfield near the fireplace to the left, several comfortable armchairs, a centre table with a few books, a book-case against the wall opposite the fireplace, and on the wall the "Portrait of a Balloon," by Oliver Bath, and several water-colours. After spraying almost every article in the room except the piano,* Nosegay *carefully closes the windows. Suddenly a ring is heard, and he goes out, returning in a few moments, preceded by the* Hon. Rupert Clavelly, *a fresh-looking young man of about thirty, with a cheerful air.* Clavelly *lifts his head as he enters as if secretly apprehensive of some invisible presence. He does this so adroitly that an eye-witness could hardly describe his action as a sniff.*

NOSEGAY. I will tell his lordship you are here.

CLAVELLY. Stop a moment, Nosegay. Tell me: does he—is it . . . as strong as ever?

NOSEGAY. I am afraid, sir, it is.

CLAVELLY. Good Lord, how awful! But here, this room . . . it seems all right, except . . . someone's upset a scent-bottle!

NOSEGAY [*going to the mantelpiece and taking the spray which he has put down there*]. No, sir, it's this, sir. I use it every morning, and always after his lordship has been here—not that it has much effect then, sir!

CLAVELLY. Good heavens! Is it as bad as that?

NOSEGAY. Yes, sir; it's very bad, sir.

CLAVELLY [*his natural cheerfulness somewhat damped*]. Well, perhaps you had better tell Lord Belvoir I'm here.

NOSEGAY. Yes, sir. [*He hesitates*] Perhaps you won't mind my making a suggestion, sir, but . . .

CLAVELLY. Certainly, Nosegay, what is it?

NOSEGAY. Well, you see, sir, this is the first time you have seen his lordship since . . .

CLAVELLY. Since the Raub dinner?

NOSEGAY. Yes, sir, and . . . it will be a great shock, sir. It might help you if you smoked. [*Hesitating and in a lower voice*] And there's another thing, sir, his face. It'll startle you, sir!

CLAVELLY. Oh, I see. Right! Thanks very much, Nosegay. [*He takes out his case and proceeds to light a cigarette.*]

[NOSEGAY *goes out carrying the scent-spray. After an interval of a few minutes the door opens, and* LORD BELVOIR *enters in a dark silk-flowered dressing-gown. The change in the man is extraordinary. At* SIR SOLOMON'S *dinner he would have passed as a good-looking young Englishman of about thirty-three, rather dark, with a slightly uncommon sensitive expression, but very youthful, almost immature in spite of his age, like many Englishmen of his class. Now he looks every year of his age and more. There is a strange, almost mocking, expression on his face, and his eyes seem extraordinarily alive. His face has gone a bright blue, the colour of the popomack. As he enters, closing the door behind him,* CLAVELLY *gasps, but moves towards him, holding out his hand.*]

CLAVELLY. How are you, Reggie?

LORD BELVOIR [*letting his hand drop*]. Smoking, Clavelly?

CLAVELLY [*taken aback and fearfully disconcerted by the popomack smell that proceeds from* LORD BELVOIR]. I only . . . I didn't know . . . I'll throw it away.

[*He is about to throw the cigarette into the fireplace.*]

LORD BELVOIR. No, no, that's all right. They all do it. Everyone I see—not that I see many nowadays [*grimly*]. You'll find you need it.

CLAVELLY [*finding himself unconsciously retreating from* LORD BELVOIR *pulls himself up sharply and*

comes nearer]. But, I say, can't anything be done?

LORD BELVOIR. Tell me, Clavelly, this is the first time you've seen me since—since that night. Do you find it very strong?

CLAVELLY [*trying to look as if he were giving an opinion on a matter of no importance*]. Well, I don't know. Perhaps it's a bit of a shock at first, but I dare say . . .

LORD BELVOIR. It's no use, Clavelly. You should see your face.

CLAVELLY [*with a burst of artificial energy*]. Look here, Reggie, this is damned unnatural! Surely something can be done?

LORD BELVOIR [*quietly*]. No, nothing. I've tried everything, do you hear? Everything!

CLAVELLY [*helplessly*]. But it'll wear off. It's sure to wear off.

LORD BELVOIR [*ironically*]. You really think so?

CLAVELLY [*stubbornly*]. Yes, of course I do; it must.

LORD BELVOIR. So many people have said that. Try and think of something more original.

CLAVELLY [*desperately*]. Have you tried anything? Have you seen any specialists?

LORD BELVOIR [*ironically*]. Oh no, of course not. Why should I? There's nothing wrong with me, is there? Have another cigarette? Take one of these; they're specially strong. I keep them on purpose.

CLAVELLY. Damn your cigarettes! Why don't you talk decently to a fellow?

LORD BELVOIR [*lifting his eyebrows*]. What do you want me to say? That you are the victim of your imagination? That this is a momentary illusion? That all will be well to-morrow? Comfortable lies to soften a quarter of an hour's unpleasantness! I've done with lies now!

CLAVELLY [*obstinately*]. I can't believe there's nothing to be done.

LORD BELVOIR .You'll have to believe it. [*With a change of tone*] Not that it really matters. For my part, I see no reason why *anything* should be done.

CLAVELLY [*sullenly*]. I don't understand you.

LORD BELVOIR. I am not conscious of this unpleasantness which apparently afflicts my friends in my presence. To myself, I am a healthy, normal person. Why should I fill the rôle they invent for me, and be the plaything of their diseased imaginations?

CLAVELLY. Do you mean to say you don't believe there is anything the matter with you?

LORD BELVOIR [*frigidly*]. I must ask you to be more careful in your language. The fact that we have known each other for some time does not give you the right to make insulting remarks before my face.

CLAVELLY [*heatedly*]. Well, if that's the way you are going to take it . . .

LORD BELVOIR [*coldly*]. Do you suppose there is any other way of taking it? Shall I call you a fool, and wait for you to argue mildly that you don't believe it? Or shall I say that you stink like a skunk?

CLAVELLY [*appalled*]. But . . . [*He stammers incoherently.*]

LORD BELVOIR. There are no doubt people who accept their character as their friends see it, and live the life their friends expect them to live. People who have no existence except in the minds of others and who seek to know what others think of them in order that they may live at all. I am not one of those people.

CLAVELLY. But there is no getting away from facts.

LORD BELVOIR. What are the facts? My presence, let us say, arouses a particularly unpleasant sensation in you. Am I to pretend that I share that sensation when I do not? Am I to regulate my life on the assumption that my presence is an offence to you and a few others who, I must say, seem to me in no way indispensable to my existence?

CLAVELLY. Well, you cannot ignore their feelings.

LORD BELVOIR. If I cannot share them, or if they deprive me of my self-respect, I *must* ignore them.

CLAVELLY. Look here, you must know this is all nonsense! Why not be sensible and let me help you? It must be possible to do something?

LORD BELVOIR [*deliberately*]. Clavelly, I have had three months of being sensible and allowing my friends to help me, and what have they done? They have turned me into a perfectly useless, helpless object on which to exercise their emotions. I might as well be paralysed in mind and brain, and have lost control of every limb as lead the life I have led since last November. I have become a mere phenomenon to be dragged from one specialist to another, to be exhibited carefully to a few select friends, to be taken out to lunch or dinner occasionally with as much preparation and stage-management as would shift an army corps. I have watched my friends actually blooming with the excitement of exploiting the emotional and theatrical possibilities of *me*. Yes, I have become a mere puppet—an interesting puppet, a puppet that eats and walks and sleeps, but which exists solely for the amusement of those who pull its strings, and has no life of its own to interfere with theirs. Presently they will get tired of me, and I shall be handed on to others. There always will be others, always an inexhaustible supply of fresh people to whom I shall be a novelty and a curiosity. But I have had enough of it: I am going to live my own life.

[*During the conversation* CLAVELLY *smokes hard, and edges involuntarily away from* LORD BELVOIR

whenever he comes near. Now, when he thinks that LORD BELVOIR *is not looking, he takes one of the special cigarettes* LORD BELVOIR *pointed out to him.*]

CLAVELLY [*comfortably handing him the cigarette-box*]. Well, I don't see what you are going to do. What about Muriel?

LORD BELVOIR [*hotly*]. What has Muriel got to do with you?

CLAVELLY [*flushing*]. Nothing . . . I only wondered how she was taking it. [*Lamely*] I haven't seen her for some time—you know I've been away.

LORD BELVOIR. Pity you ever came back. I should have thought Africa was just the place for you.

CLAVELLY. Now my dear old chap you're not going to ruffle me. I take it that your engagement is not yet broken off.

LORD BELVOIR. What did you come here for? Have you no better way of spending your time?

CLAVELLY. Look here, Reggie, isn't there anything I can do for you?

LORD BELVOIR [*with a deliberate sneer*]. How much longer do you think you can stand it?

CLAVELLY [*flushing*]. I didn't come here to be insulted by an old friend.

LORD BELVOIR. Are you sure?

CLAVELLY [*nettled*]. Well, if you are determined to act in this manner there is nothing for me but to go.

LORD BELVOIR. Your limited intelligence is working at last.

[CLAVELLY, *furious, seizes his hat and stick and leaves the room without another word.* LORD BELVOIR *paces about the room for a few minutes and then, standing near the curtains, suddenly sniffs the air. He frowns violently and rings the bell.*]

[*Enter* NOSEGAY.]

LORD BELVOIR. What is this smell of scent?

NOSEGAY [*blandly*]. What scent, my lord?

LORD BELVOIR. Damn you! Don't quibble with me! The place reeks of scent. Who bought it?

[NOSEGAY *does not reply.* LORD BELVOIR *stares at him furiously as if about to strike him, and then, with a tremendous effort, controls himself, and walks away.*]

NOSEGAY. You have never objected to it before, my lord, and I have been doing it for the last month.

[LORD BELVOIR *is facing the window with his back to* NOSEGAY; *after a few seconds he turns.*]

LORD BELVOIR. Nosegay, I want to talk to you. I have no fault to find with you, but if you are to stay with me we must understand each other. It is possible that you would like to find another situation. [NOSEGAY *shakes his head.*] Wait a moment! If you do—and in the circumstances it would be only natural, and I should in no way resent it—I shall make it my business to find you a situation in every way as good as

whenever he comes near. Now, when he thinks that LORD BELVOIR *is not looking, he takes one of the special cigarettes* LORD BELVOIR *pointed out to him.*]

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you live with me, and put it completely out of your mind?

NOSEGAY [*slowly*]. Yes, my lord, I think I can. I never had a very keen sense of . . .

LORD BELVOIR [*smiling*]. No! Or you couldn't have sprayed the room with that filthy scent. Well, no more of that sort of thing, mind! And now we'll consider it settled. [*The bell rings.*] See who it is. [*Exit* NOSEGAY *and re-enters after a second.*]

NOSEGAY. Sir Philo Phaoron, my lord.

LORD BELVOIR. Show him up. [*Exit* NOSEGAY.] [*A noise as of a man dragging upstairs heavily is heard, then a curiously muffled voice shouting* "Mind those pipes, Nosegay! This way! be careful now!" *Suddenly the door flies open and* SIR PHILO PHAORON *enters, clothed from head to foot in a complete diving dress, followed by* NOSEGAY, *carrying the long air pipes and communicating line. Waving one hand to* LORD BELVOIR, *he has a speaking trumpet in the other, with which he signals to* NOSEGAY *to deposit the tubes on the floor.*] [*Exit* NOSEGAY, *closing the door.*]

LORD BELVOIR. Whatever's the meaning of this, Phaoron?

[SIR PHILO *lumbers heavily across to the window and opens it. Putting his trumpet to his helmet he shouts*: More air! Pump harder, you devils! I'm suffocating! *Then he closes it, turns and waves both hands to* LORD BELVOIR, *and shouts through his speaking trumpet.*]

SIR PHILO. Help me open this!

[LORD BELVOIR *unscrews a nut as he is directed and then the front of the helmet swings open, revealing the beaming face of* SIR PHILO, *covered with perspiration*]. Phew! It's hot in this rig-out. What a relief to find no one here! Well, my boy, how are you? Isn't this a magnificent idea? [*pointing to his diving suit.* LORD BELVOIR *continues to stare at him in amazement.*] I only thought of it the other day. Now I can go anywhere. It's absolutely air-proof.

LORD BELVOIR. Do you mean to say that you've been about in that get-up?

SIR PHILO. Certainly, and what is more, my boy, it's been an immense success. Three nights ago I tried it for the first time at the Royal Geographical Society's dinner. I had been fearfully upset at the thought of missing it. You know life hasn't really been worth living these last three months, and the idea that I should never go there again just about put the finishing touch on. I was sitting at home—I hadn't been out for a couple of weeks—reading some rotten book, *The Memoirs of a New Guinea Magistrate* it was, and the fellow was describing the diving in the pearl fisheries there when the idea suddenly came to me. I jumped up, went to the telephone, ordered the whole rig-out, and hired two seamen and a pumping-engine—do you hear it? It's out-

side—and tried it. It was perfect. Now my man dresses me in the morning, and when the fellows arrive they put the engine in the car, and I can go anywhere.

LORD BELVOIR. Good God! And how did you get on at the dinner?

SIR PHILO. Of course I couldn't eat anything, but my reception was tremendous. There was a fellow there who had just come back from climbing Mount Everest, but he was an absolute frost. No one took the slightest notice of him. At dinner I made a speech—with this trumpet and a special metal diaphragm in the helmet I can speak perfectly—I rose in a perfect storm of cheers. "Gentlemen," I said, "you see before you one who has suffered a severe blow at the hands of Fate—a calamity such as has hitherto befallen no living man." (Of course we don't know about those Chinese fellows who have eaten it. Probably they smelt so much already that they never noticed it.) "But nothing, gentlemen, can daunt the spirit of a member of the Royal Geographical Society." At this they positively yelled at me. Earl Brasston—you know old Copper-eye—slapped me on the back; he was nearly delirious, poor fellow, and drank my health, but they pulled him down, and shouted "Go on! go on!" So I went on—I went on for nearly an hour. Upon my soul, I couldn't have believed I was capable

of such eloquence. And the scene afterwards was terrific. They sent down drinks to my seamen, and I was in a panic lest they should get drunk and forget to pump, but all went well. And do you know, I'm simply loaded with invitations. And I've got to spend next week-end at Brasston, the old boy absolutely insisted. I say! I forgot to tell those fellows to stop pumping! [*He rushes to the window, opens it and shouts*] Stop pumping there, until I let you know!

LORD BELVOIR. Well, I suppose you feel the problem's solved?

SIR PHILO [*ever so slightly damped*]. Well, it's a solution, isn't it?

LORD BELVOIR. And what about the enquiries Professor Hermann was making?

SIR PHILO. About that antidote? I heard from him; he has found nothing; but [*cheerfully*] I am not going to bother about that now.

LORD BELVOIR. Do you propose to go about for the rest of your days like this?

SIR PHILO. Why not? As a matter of fact, I rather enjoy it. After all, dress is a mere matter of convention. It's only a question of getting used to it. Everybody I've seen so far has been thrilled by my appearance.

LORD BELVOIR. And how long do you think that's going to last?

SIR PHILO. Oh! I don't know, and in any case

there'll always be fresh worlds to conquer—"To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new." Just imagine my first appearance in Paris at the Institut Français. Old Flammarion would think me a new star.

LORD BELVOIR [*sighing*]. Ah, well! I suppose it's possible.

SIR PHILO. Possible, of course it's possible! It's rather different for you, I admit. My life outside this apparatus is over. I can retire to my shell, and the little society I need I can now get by taking my shell along with me. In fact, I need never come out of it. All that exists of me to-day at my age is a voice, still issuing from this decaying body whose increasing foulness I henceforth disguise for ever. Only my spirit shall move among men, like a sound issuing out of the tomb.

LORD BELVOIR [*thoughtfully*]. Do you know, I believe you are right.

SIR PHILO. I'm sure of it. I consider myself most fortunate. I am like a man in the *Arabian Nights*, to whom in a dream some marvellous transformation has happened, but I am awake, and it is still true. I wouldn't go back now to the days before I ate the popomack for anything. . . . That reminds me, have there been any answers to our advertisement in *The Times?*

LORD BELVOIR. Not yet, but of course it is still appearing.

SIR PHILO. Did you arrange for it to appear at the same time in the Shanghai and Pekin papers?

LORD BELVOIR. Yes, but I'm not very hopeful.

[*The bell rings and presently* NOSEGAY *enters.*]

NOSEGAY. Sir Solomon Raub.

[*Exit* NOSEGAY.]

[*Enter* SIR SOLOMON, *in top hat, morning coat, white spats, looking as glossy and confident as ever, but with, for the curious observer, a slight uneasiness beneath his outward smooth manner. In his ears and nostrils are wads of cotton wool.*]

SIR SOLOMON. How d'ye do, Belvoir?

[*He suddenly sees* SIR PHILO.]

SIR PHILO [*beaming*]. Morning, Sir Solomon. [*He slaps him on the back, and one of the cotton-wool wads drop out.*] What's this? [*picking it up*].

SIR SOLOMON [*slightly ruffled, snatching it and putting it in his nose again, pointing to* SIR PHILO'S *diving suit.*] And what may I ask is this?

SIR PHILO. This is my new way of dressing, Sir Solomon. In future you will always see me arrayed, not as the inferior mass of mankind, but as one who has eaten the popomack.

SIR SOLOMON [*glaring at him*]. I'm glad you think it a subject for tomfoolery. Four days ago you told me you couldn't stand it any longer, and threatened to commit suicide. My health's getting ruined for want of sleep. I've not slept for weeks. I'm worn out rushing

from place to place seeing people, to try to discover some means of getting rid of this awful thing, and here you stand and joke about it!

SIR PHILO [*cheerfully*]. Have you seen *The Times* this morning?

SIR SOLOMON. No, I haven't. I've just glanced at it!

SIR PHILO. Well, you evidently did not read the account of the Royal Geographical Society's dinner. I was the hero of it. The man from the Himalayas was nowhere.

SIR SOLOMON. You! At the dinner!

SIR PHILO. Yes.

SIR SOLOMON. How? Whatever do you mean?

SIR PHILO. I in my new popomack equipment. Didn't you notice the two sailors and the vacuum-cleaner outside the house as you came in?

SIR SOLOMON [*shortly*]. Yes. I saw some sort of a machine in a car.

SIR PHILO [*triumphantly*]. Well, it's mine, but it's not a vacuum cleaner, it's a diving pump for my diving dress. I was just going when you came. I'll be off now and give you a demonstration. [*He goes and opens the window.*] Hallo! Start pumping there! [*He closes the window.*] [*To* LORD BELVOIR] Help me to screw this on. [*With the help of* LORD BELVOIR *he screws on the face of the diving helmet, then lifts his speaking*

trumpet to his face.] Call Nosegay to help me down. [LORD BELVOIR *rings.*] [NOSEGAY *enters and takes up his air pipes.*] Carefully, Nosegay! Good-bye, my boy. Au revoir, Sir Solomon. Don't forget to read that report in *The Times.* [*At the door to* LORD BELVOIR] Let me know if you get any answer to the advertisement. [*Exit* with NOSEGAY.]

[SIR SOLOMON *and* LORD BELVOIR *sit down gloomily and listen to the car driving away. The noise fades. Silence.*]

SIR SOLOMON. I always thought that man was a buffoon.

LORD BELVOIR. Perhaps, but he has solved the problem.

SIR SOLOMON. You don't mean to say you think you can carry on like that?

LORD BELVOIR. No, he has only solved his own problem. It remains for me to solve mine.

SIR SOLOMON. Did he tell you what Hermann says?

LORD BELVOIR. He told me they had no hope of being able to do anything.

SIR SOLOMON. And I've heard the same from the Oriental School of Medicine in Paris.

LORD BELVOIR. Well? I'm not going to trouble about anything of that sort in the future.

SIR SOLOMON [*alarmed*]. What do you mean?

LORD BELVOIR [*as if thinking to himself*]. It has nothing to do with my life. To bother oneself

with it at all is a mere concession to other people's feelings—like wearing a top hat at a wedding.

SIR SOLOMON [*somewhat relieved*]. Well, how many weddings would you be asked to if you made a habit of appearing in flannels, or—to use a much nearer analogy—naked?

LORD BELVOIR. More than you think, perhaps; but I don't grant your analogy.

SIR SOLOMON. The difference is very slight, I assure you. You find it difficult to realise now. You probably forget at times that there is anything the matter with you at all since you yourself cannot notice it. [LORD BELVOIR *winces*.] But can't you remember, can't you recall what it was like when I cut it—before you ate it?

LORD BELVOIR. Well, it can't be so unendurable when you've been sitting here for some time . . . and there's Nosegay.

SIR SOLOMON [*pointing to his nose pad*]. This is a very inadequate protection, I assure you, but nevertheless without it I could not stay here much longer. Even so, I suffer extreme discomfort.

LORD BELVOIR [*rising*]. I've no wish to inconvenience you.

SIR SOLOMON. Please sit down. Any formality of that sort is out of place between us.

LORD BELVOIR [*bitterly*]. Yes, you think I have lost even the right to a conventional courtesy.

SIR SOLOMON. Well, it's no use living in a fool's paradise. If I have to come into a man's presence padded like this he cannot be squeamish about trifles.

LORD BELVOIR [*hostile*]. I am not aware that I asked you to come.

SIR SOLOMON. What do you mean? Come, don't be foolish. I only want to help you.

LORD BELVOIR. And I am not aware of having asked for your help.

SIR SOLOMON [*with a glance at him*]. I fully understand what you must be feeling. Believe me, I have the deepest sympathy for you; especially, as you must realise, when I am in some sort the cause of your misfortune.

LORD BELVOIR [*violently*]. Misfortune? What misfortune?

SIR SOLOMON [*a little uneasy*]. Well, well, we won't quarrel over a word. [*Soothingly*] I have another matter to talk to you about.

LORD BELVOIR [*coldly*]. Indeed! What is it?

SIR SOLOMON [*looks nettled for a moment, then continues smoothly*]. It's about Muriel. You, of course, realise that in the circumstances a continuance of your engagement is impossible.

LORD BELVOIR. Impossible! Why?

SIR SOLOMON [*beginning to get ruffled*]. Surely you don't need me to tell you why! Be reasonable!

LORD BELVOIR. Reasonable? Why should I be reasonable?

SIR SOLOMON [*is about to retort, but checks himself, then speaks*]. Lord Belvoir, I don't know why you are adopting this curious attitude, but I am sure you would not wish to take advantage of Muriel's reluctance to break off an engagement which she cannot possibly desire to continue, but which in the circumstances her natural sensitiveness may prevent her repudiating.

LORD BELVOIR. You say she wishes to be released from our engagement.

SIR SOLOMON [*evasively, but with an assumed vigour*]. Naturally she must do so.

LORD BELVOIR [*politely*]. You must forgive me if I fail to see the necessity or to accept the implication.

SIR SOLOMON [*angrily*]. That's nonsense! You must see that she can't possibly marry you.

LORD BELVOIR. I am sorry not to share your low opinion of me, but I don't. I, on the other hand, think very highly of you. I think your manners are charming.

SIR SOLOMON [*exasperated*]. Don't waste your irony on me! You refuse to release her. Very well! It is not of any consequence, but I must say I'm surprised, I expected you to act like a gentleman.

LORD BELVOIR [*with cold irony*]. I! A gentleman! Do you come into a gentleman's presence disinfected like that?

SIR SOLOMON [*shrugging his shoulders*]. I've already said that you have my deepest sympathy. [*Rising from his seat.*]

LORD BELVOIR [*controlling himself with an effort*]. Sympathy! Do you think that if you were not Muriel's father I should tolerate these insults? I accept you such as you are; I make no reference to your defects, personal or moral, but do you therefore think yourself perfect? My God! I have at least as much difficulty in tolerating you as you have me! *You* have my deepest sympathy!

SIR SOLOMON. Thank you, but you see, unlike you, I do not need it. I at least do not fill my daughter with repulsion.

LORD BELVOIR [*startled*]. Repulsion!

SIR SOLOMON [*mockingly*]. Does that surprise you? Why have you never been to our house during the last three months? You simply did not dare to meet her!

LORD BELVOIR. While there was hope I wished to spare her unnecessary annoyance.

SIR SOLOMON. Annoyance! Three months' absence to spare a woman a little annoyance! Well, let that pass, but now? Dare you see her now?

LORD BELVOIR [*after a slight pause*]. Yes.

SIR SOLOMON [*seeming surprised for a moment, then he laughs*]. I've always said few men have the pluck to face the truth about themselves. . . . You'll have a rude awakening!

LORD BELVOIR. Perhaps, but in that case I shall feel I have had a fortunate escape.

SIR SOLOMON [*sneering*]. You do value yourself highly. What attraction do you think you can possibly have for a woman?

LORD BELVOIR. Am I so different a person to-day from the man I was three months ago?

SIR SOLOMON. You are only physically abhorrent! But perhaps you believe in the marriage of souls!

LORD BELVOIR [*with a slight shudder*]. I believe that I do not exist merely as a smell.

SIR SOLOMON. That is true, though there is very little a woman gets from a man except through her senses. If there were no other man in the world, no doubt any woman would accept you. But have you something that no other man has got? [*He bursts out into laughter*] Ha! Ha! Ha! [LORD BELVOIR *waits without stirring*. SIR SOLOMON *suddenly stops laughing. He continues deliberately*] Have you anything else that no other man has got which a woman can share, can appreciate and enjoy, which will make it worth her while to endure such a sacrifice as marrying you entails?

LORD BELVOIR [*gloomily*]. That is what I have got to find out.

SIR SOLOMON. Yes, and when in your presumption you have told yourself you possess it, you have got to find that *she* desires it. Humph! like

most men you are a fool where women are concerned! I tell you that in twelve months my daughter will be engaged to someone else. In twenty-four months she will be married to someone else. In three years she will have children by someone else, and the difference between those children and the children she would have by you will not matter to her or to the universe.

LORD BELVOIR. It may be so, but I don't believe it.

SIR SOLOMON. Do you think that if you were blotted out to-morrow it would make any difference to the future? Do you imagine the world would cease to go on, or that it would be the poorer without you? Every hen clucks when it has laid its egg, thinking it the only egg in the universe. Even supposing you are unique, that there is no one living exactly like you, and—which is quite another point—that your singularity is of value, do you really believe that Life which has produced you once cannot produce you again?

LORD BELVOIR. That is what I believe, what I must believe.

SIR SOLOMON. Millions of worms crawling in the Palæozoic mud struggled like you, each one for its existence, as if the future depended upon it. But did any one worm matter? Did they matter even in their millions? Poor blind existences, they could not conceive a world with-

out worms, as we cannot conceive a world without men, but I tell you that men *and* worms are like the foam on the waves of the sea, mere fleeting gestures of the wind signifying nothing.

LORD BELVOIR. I do not believe it. The breath of life is not without but within. You yourself do not believe it or why should you care who marries your daughter?

SIR SOLOMON. I don't. Do you think I believe she matters, or that whomever she married I should not despise, as I despise all men, lusting after women because they can't help it, and slaving to satisfy their lusts? It is all loathsome, but I can at least cloak its loathsomeness in delighting my senses. I can feast my eyes on the beauty of the bride and the male vigour of the bridegroom, and in imagination enjoy their nuptial delight, drowning my disgust in champagne; but I will not tolerate [*with an expression of disgust*] an offence in my nostrils, as I would not keep a stinking weed in my garden among my roses.

LORD BELVOIR [*pale*]. Are you sure that you may not fill your daughter with repulsion?

SIR SOLOMON [*going to the door*]. You do not know women, and Muriel is not my daughter for nothing. If she never meets you again she may pity you, and even remember you with what fools call affection, but if she met you you could inspire her only with disgust.

[*Exit* SIR SOLOMON.]

[BELVOIR *turns and stares into the empty fireplace. Presently* NOSEGAY *enters with a note which he presents to* BELVOIR.]

NOSEGAY. Miss Raub is downstairs, my lord, and asked me to give you this note.

LORD BELVOIR [*opening it*]. Is she alone?

NOSEGAY. Yes, my lord.

LORD BELVOIR [*hesitates and walks about the room*]. Ask her to come up.

[*Exit* NOSEGAY. *He returns in a moment and opens the door.*]

NOSEGAY. Miss Raub.

[*Exit* NOSEGAY.]

[MURIEL *is charmingly dressed as usual. At the doorway she falters, turns visibly pale, then walks into the room.*]

MURIEL. I had to come. Why have you never been to see me?

LORD BELVOIR [*he does not attempt to approach her, but moves farther away towards the piano*]. Your father has just been here.

MURIEL [*involuntarily*]. What a narrow escape!

LORD BELVOIR. Ah! You realise that!

MURIEL [*nervously*]. Why was he here—any news—anything special?

LORD BELVOIR. If you mean, did he bring any good news, no!

MURIEL. Any bad?

LORD BELVOIR. Not really. Tell me, Muriel, have

you ever shared those fatuous expectations of my being cured of this ——?

MURIEL. Why fatuous? [*Hesitatingly*] I have always hoped . . .

LORD BELVOIR. Well, there is no hope. Do you understand? Absolutely no hope!

MURIEL [*desperately*]. I don't believe it! I can't believe it!

LORD BELVOIR. Professor Hermann says so. Your father has heard the same thing from Paris. You see, it is something quite out of the ordinary, and in a way natural. To alter it now is like trying to change the colour of one's eyes.

MURIEL [*faltering*]. It's incredible!

LORD BELVOIR. I have made up my mind. I am not going to waste my life going from specialist to specialist and running after every new quack who thinks he can cure me of a disability of which I am not conscious, which in no way affects my mental or physical vigour, and which really is as irrelevant to my true personality as a wooden leg. If I am not to become like one of those unhappy victims of imaginary diseases who exist only as a subject for medical experiment and discussion, I must abolish from my mind the very existence of this affliction. This would be quite easy for me to do if I could live absolutely alone, but as that is impossible, the only alternative is for my friends also to be completely oblivious of it, to put it completely

out of their minds for ever. Those who cannot do this I shall not number among my friends, and I will take care to show them that they are not wanted. [*He pauses.* MURIEL *does not speak. Anxiously*] Muriel, you are silent! What are you thinking?

MURIEL [*softly*]. You are asking a great deal from them. You, of course, do not realise how much.

LORD BELVOIR. Muriel! Is it so very much? To ignore a mere sensation, an ugly sensation, if you will, but do they never put up with ugliness in the world about them? Are they so sensitive that they cannot tolerate a slight physical discomfort for the sake of—— [*He hesitates.*]

MURIEL [*gently*]. For the sake of what?

LORD BELVOIR [*stares in front of him: he does not dare to look at her*]. I have not always wholly liked the people I have known intimately. There have been things about them, personal things, sometimes physical, sometimes neither physical nor mental, but far deeper, which have aroused in me profound distaste. I have even felt about some that they were evil, a feeling far worse than any that can be caused by a mere physical deformity, yet I have never turned my back on them without a consciousness of loss.

MURIEL [*with a slight shudder*]. How one longs to be brave!

LORD BELVOIR [*he does not look at her*]. Muriel!

MURIEL [*as if in a dream*]. I do not understand these things. One does them, or one doesn't do them, and one never knows what one is going to do. I am afraid of myself. What am I going to do? [*She walks slowly towards* LORD BELVOIR, *who stands absolutely motionless, and puts her arms around him*]. Reg——! [*She faints.*]

[LORD BELVOIR *places her gently on the chesterfield and rings the bell.*]

[NOSEGAY *enters.*]

LORD BELVOIR. Miss Raub has fainted. Call the housekeeper, and bring some brandy.

Curtain

Act II

SCENE I

SCENE. Lord Belvoir's *old rooms in Half Moon Street. Time: Evening. Nothing is changed except for a few books and miscellaneous articles. Seated in an armchair facing the picture is the* Second Young Man *of Act I. In another chair is the* First Young Man. *They are smoking after dinner.*

First Young Man. You say Lord Belvoir shot himself. Was it in this room?

Second Young Man. It isn't known whether it was here or in his bedroom.

First Young Man. What was the reason?

Second Young Man. There were all sorts of stories about his having eaten a popomack and smelling horribly; it was a most mysterious affair.

First Young Man. I wonder you care to live here.

Second Young Man. I didn't intend it. But I had always wanted that picture. You remember how annoyed I was when we went back to the gallery and discovered that it had just been bought. Then when I heard all his things were to be sold I came here to see it, and when I was here looking at it I suddenly thought why shouldn't I buy everything and live here myself?

FIRST YOUNG MAN. What a strange idea?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Not at all. I had always been attracted by what I had heard of Lord Belvoir, although I had never met him; the very fact that he had bought that picture seemed to be a link between us, and the impulse came over me so suddenly and was so strong it was just as if I was doing something that had always been inevitable.

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*with a shudder*]. I shouldn't like to live here. There's something queer about the place, I should feel it was haunted.

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*leaning forward*]. It is haunted.

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*startled*]. Good God! What do you mean?

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*in a strange voice*]. I have been trying to understand what happened to Lord Belvoir, and I often sit at night looking at that picture, and slowly, as I sit there, I feel that I am getting very near to what happened. I feel it is all around me, printed as it were indelibly upon the air, and that it requires only a very little to make it all suddenly visible. [*In a lower tone*] That is why I have moved nothing since I came here. Everything is exactly as it was when he went out for the last time, or stood in this room and shot himself. And I'll tell you something more, I believe I know exactly where he shot himself.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Good God!

SECOND YOUNG MAN. He came and stood in front of this picture and shot himself there. [*Rising and continuing with suppressed excitement*] He stood just here, do you see? Now why did he do that? [*He clasps his head and paces up and down.*]

FIRST YOUNG MAN. But how do you know all this?

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*resuming his seat*]. I suddenly saw it as I sat looking at that picture. I believe if we look at it long enough and surrender ourselves to the influence of this place, we shall see all that happened in this room. [*In a whisper*] Can't you feel that it is all here?

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*shivering*]. There's something strange about this place.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. It's Belvoir! He's here! Everything that passed through his mind as he stood gazing at that picture before he shot himself! He lived it all over again that last day, and we shall see it. Look there! Look! It's Belvoir.

[*The lights go out and then rise again on the same scene. There is no one in the room but* LORD BELVOIR, *and he is reading. Presently he looks at his watch and goes to the telephone.*]

LORD BELVOIR. Mayfair 2713, yes, please. Hallo! Is that Mayfair 2713? I want to speak to Miss Raub; will you put me through? Hallo! Is

that you, Muriel? . . . Yes, the same as usual! What have you been doing to-day? . . . Did you enjoy it? . . . Who was there? . . . Yes . . . Was Clavelly there? . . . Oh, did he? . . . Yes, but I felt nervous, going out for the first time for weeks. However, it was splendidly arranged. There was not even a commissionaire at the door. I had the whole gallery to myself. Nosegay waited downstairs for me, I stayed there a couple of hours, and looked at all my favourite pictures. The English loan collection is admirable. There are some beautiful early Johns. I suppose you're going to-morrow to the private view. Who's going with you? . . . Oh! How is your mother? . . . No, not one so far. Phaoron tells me our advertisement for the popomack has been appearing in the Chinese papers for a good many weeks now, but that's no reason to be despondent. There are not likely to be many people alive even in China who have ever heard of it, and the news that someone is advertising will only get about slowly . . . [*He looks at his watch*] It's just on half-past seven . . . Must you? Where are you dining? . . . Yes, I've met them once, about a year ago . . . Good-bye, darling. You've something to say to me! What is it? Tell me now? Please! Oh, very well, I'll ring up when you get back. About eleven, will that do?

[*He rings off, walks about the room for a few minutes, and then returns to his armchair and takes up the book he was reading. Presently he seems to have fallen asleep.*]

[*Enter* NOSEGAY.]

NOSEGAY. There's a man downstairs, my lord, who says he has come about an advertisement. Did you expect anyone?

LORD BELVOIR. About an advertisement. It must be about the popomack! [*Eagerly*] Show him up. Wait a moment. What sort of a man is he?

NOSEGAY. He's a man of about fifty, my lord, and looks rather like a sailor.

LORD BELVOIR. Very well, show him up.

[NOSEGAY *goes out and presently returns with* CAPTAIN ANTHONY, *who is carrying a large handkerchief, which he holds to his nose. He wears the soft, loose clothes of the* OLD MAN *in Act I, whom he exactly resembles, except that he has a white beard.*]

NOSEGAY. Captain Anthony. [*Exit.*]

LORD BELVOIR [*rising and holding out his hand*]. How do you do? My name is Belvoir, Lord Belvoir.

ANTHONY. Very pleased to meet you, Lord Belvoir.

LORD BELVOIR. Will you have a cigar? Do you mind helping yourself? They're in that box. Take a chair. That's a comfortable one.

ANTHONY [*takes one*]. Thank you.

LORD BELVOIR. I suppose it was the advertisement in *The Times* you saw?

ANTHONY. No, I never see *The Times*. I only got in yesterday.

LORD BELVOIR. Then you've no doubt come from the East?

ANTHONY. Yes. Shanghai.

LORD BELVOIR. Did you see the advertisement there?

ANTHONY. Well, not exactly, but I heard of it, and as I was coming home I found out all the particulars. I thought I might come and see the person. That advertisement did not say much.

LORD BELVOIR. It said a high price would be paid to anyone who could procure, or could inform the advertiser how to procure, a popomack fruit. That seems to be quite enough.

ANTHONY. No doubt, no doubt, if it were a matter of ordinary business. But the popomack is not ordinary business. I am curious to discover how you came to know anything about it. I am astonished that you came to eat it.

LORD BELVOIR. Well, there is very little to tell. A friend of mine received from China, where he has a business house, a popomack, and having heard how rare a delicacy it was, he invited myself and others to dinner some three months ago. One other guest beside myself ate this fruit, with the unfortunate result of

which you are no doubt conscious, and we simply want to obtain another popomack. That is the purpose of our advertisement.

ANTHONY. I see. I suppose you know all about the popomack by now.

LORD BELVOIR. Well, no one seems to know very much about it. Few people in the world have ever heard of it, and it seems highly probable that my friend and I are the only people living who have tasted one.

ANTHONY. No, that is not so!

LORD BELVOIR. Ah! then you know where this fruit can be got?

ANTHONY. Do you mind telling me why you want another popomack?

LORD BELVOIR. I am engaged to the daughter of the man who gave that dinner. When she has eaten it we are going to get married.

ANTHONY. Twenty years ago, when I was before the mast, I was in a brig engaged in the island trade of the China sea. We had with us a young man who had run away from home to be a sailor; his name was Marjoribanks, but he called himself Marchbanks, same as your name is Belvoir, but you call it Beaver. We had been driven out of our course in a storm, and at daybreak one morning we found ourselves near a small island. As we wanted water we manned a boat and landed a party, who scoured about to find a spring. Presently Marjoribanks

returned with a huge blue fruit which he had found growing. We decided to cut it and try it, but on opening it there came forth such a stench that no one could touch it except young Marjoribanks, who ate the whole thing under our eyes before you could say Jack Robinson. When the fruit was all gone, however, the stench remained, and seemed to come from Marjoribanks. We ducked him in the sea, but still he smelt. We didn't know what to do with him, it was almost impossible to go near him, and so we left him on the island.

LORD BELVOIR. You mean to say you left him alone on the island?

ANTHONY. Yes, we sailed away, and for all I know he's there to this day.

LORD BELVOIR. Could you find that island again?

ANTHONY. I dare say I could.

LORD BELVOIR. Well, will you take my yacht "Adventuress" and bring back a popomack, or as many as you can?

ANTHONY. Well, that's a proposition; but I dare say I might accept it. When would you want me to start?

LORD BELVOIR. Oh, you can start at once.

ANTHONY. Excellent! Do you know I should rather like to see poor Marjoribanks again. I have often thought about him.

LORD BELVOIR. Well, I'll give you a letter to the officer in charge of the "Adventuress" at

Southampton, he will supply you with all you require, and when you return wire me and come straight here with the popomack.

ANTHONY. I will.

[*The scene fades. When it becomes visible again,* LORD BELVOIR *is still in his chair. The door opens, and* NOSEGAY *appears.*]

NOSEGAY. Captain Anthony has arrived, my lord.

LORD BELVOIR [*excitedly*]. Show him up!

[*The door opens and* CAPTAIN ANTHONY *enters.*]

ANTHONY. I hope you got my wire, sir.

LORD BELVOIR. Yes, have you got it?

ANTHONY. Yes, here it is.

[*He takes from a large bag a popomack and places it on the table.*]

LORD BELVOIR. I have told Miss Raub; she will be here to eat it in a few moments, and then, Anthony, we shall be married the day after to-morrow, and you must come to our wedding.

ANTHONY. I shall be delighted.

[*Enter* NOSEGAY.]

NOSEGAY. Miss Raub, my lord.

LORD BELVOIR. Show her up; and, Nosegay, bring a knife and plate.

NOSEGAY. Yes, my lord.

[*Exit. The door opens and* MURIEL *enters.*]

LORD BELVOIR. Muriel! Allow me to introduce you to Captain Anthony.

[*They shake hands, and* LORD BELVOIR *walks*

about the room in a state of great excitement. MURIEL *is pale and obviously distressed.*]

MURIEL [*hesitatingly*]. Reggie!

[*At this moment the door opens and* NOSEGAY *enters with a knife and plate, which he places on the table. He goes out.* LORD BELVOIR *at once takes the knife and is about to insert it in the popomack.*]

MURIEL [*imploringly*]. Stop, Reggie! I came to tell you. Oh, do forgive me, but I can't!

[ANTHONY *creeps out into the shadow.*]

LORD BELVOIR [*thunderstruck*]. Muriel! What do you mean?

MURIEL [*clenching her gloved hands*]. I simply can't do it. I can't! I can't!

LORD BELVOIR [*helplessly*]. But, Muriel, you promised. We've been months waiting for this day. I don't understand you!

MURIEL. I don't understand myself.

LORD BELVOIR. But why this sudden change?

MURIEL. It isn't a sudden change. I've known all the time in my heart that I couldn't do it, but I've been too great a coward to tell you.

LORD BELVOIR. But . . . Muriel, don't you love me?

MURIEL. I'm very fond of you, Reggie, but I can't marry you.

LORD BELVOIR. Can't marry me? Muriel darling, you're frightened, but it's nothing. Now just eat this, and all will be well.

MURIEL [*firmly*]. Reggie, it's no good. I'm not going to marry you.

LORD BELVOIR. I don't understand. What is the matter, Muriel?

[*He moves towards her to take her in his arms, but she recoils.*]

MURIEL. Don't make it harder for me, Reggie!

[*She turns away and puts on a mask.*]

LORD BELVOIR [*furiously*]. Hard for you, but what about me? Do you expect me to take any notice of such nonsense?

[*He goes up to her to take her in his arms. She turns to face him, showing her features covered with a mask. He steps back, astonished.*]

MURIEL [*coldly*]. Now will you let me go?

LORD BELVOIR [*imploringly*]. Muriel, what's the matter with you? Why have you changed?

MURIEL. I am awfully sorry, Reggie, but I have found that my feelings are not what I thought they were.

LORD BELVOIR [*scornfully*]. Well, your father was right. He said you'd never be able to stand me now.

MURIEL. It isn't that, I assure you.

LORD BELVOIR. Oh, yes, it is.

MURIEL. You're wrong! Even if I ate the popomack it would make no difference really!

LORD BELVOIR [*laughing almost hysterically*]. Oh wouldn't it? Do you think the fellow you want to marry would have you then?

MURIEL. I don't want to marry anyone.

LORD BELVOIR [*coldly*]. Let me tell you you're a liar! Don't you think I haven't known this would happen? While I have been cooped up here unable to take you about, other men have been seeing you, talking to you, dancing with you, riding with you! My God, to think what I've suffered! Day after day I have had to sit here absolutely helpless, knowing that every minute I was losing you, and [*with a change in tone*] losing you for ever to some worthless bounder who smells of tobacco instead of popomack!

MURIEL. I am sorry, Reggie, really!

LORD BELVOIR. Are you quite sure you love this one? Do you know anything about love at all? How long do you think it will last?

MURIEL. I've told you before I'm not in love with anyone.

LORD BELVOIR. I believe you. But now and then you want a man, and you're not going to take a man who will be a nuisance as I shall be. Neither are you going to sacrifice the pleasures you've been accustomed to in order to go away and live with him. You haven't got it in you to make yourself a new life with me.

MURIEL [*desperately*]. Will you believe me? I am acting on instinct. Do you think I'd let anything stop me if I loved you?

LORD BELVOIR. But, Muriel, you loved me; I know you loved me.

MURIEL. Perhaps I did. I don't understand it.

LORD BELVOIR. You'll find you love me still. Everything will come right if you take this [*offering her the popomack*]. Do, Muriel!

MURIEL. It's no use, Reggie, I can't.

LORD BELVOIR. Well, there's nothing more to be said. I wonder if you know what you do want.

MURIEL. I don't think what I want exists.

LORD BELVOIR. No, and if it did, you wouldn't know it!

MURIEL. But I feel I ought not to do anything that I can resist doing. Why can't you make me want you so badly, Reggie, that I should eat the popomack, or do anything for you?

LORD BELVOIR. Yes; blame me that you don't love me.

MURIEL. Well, you are to blame. There must be something lacking in you.

LORD BELVOIR. My God! Why do I love you?

MURIEL. Perhaps you don't, perhaps you only think you do! [*Holding out her hand*] Good-bye!

LORD BELVOIR [*speechless*]. Oh . . . er—good-bye!

[*She goes immediately.* LORD BELVOIR *stands motionless for a moment, and then walks about the room kicking everything that is light enough to be kicked painlessly.*] Damnation! [*He rings furiously.* NOSEGAY *enters.*] Where's Captain Anthony?

NOSEGAY. I don't know . . .

ANTHONY [*emerging from the shadows*]. Here I am.

[NOSEGAY *vanishes.*]

LORD BELVOIR [*looking towards the popomack*]. She won't touch it. [*Furiously*] She's got hold of some other man now! She's a heartless minx! Her father was right, damn him!

ANTHONY [*ironically*]. I thought she'd be a wonder if she took it.

LORD BELVOIR. But she never seemed more desirable! Why did I let her go? Fool! Why didn't I force her to eat it? My God! I am an idiot! She doesn't know her own mind. Force is what she wants. My God, I am a fool!

ANTHONY. You can easily do the trick if you want to!

LORD BELVOIR. What's that you're saying?

ANTHONY. You can easily get your own back on these folk.

LORD BELVOIR. What do you mean? How?

ANTHONY. Give out that you're cured by an antidote I've brought back from China. Invite them to a celebration dinner and give them the popomack disguised in the soup. Then you'll all be in the same boat, and she'll have to have you.

LORD BELVOIR [*staring in astonishment*]. Splendid! My God, you're a marvel! What an idea! I'll fix it up at once.

[*He goes to the bell and rings it.* NOSEGAY *appears at the doorway. The scene fades. When the lights go up the table in* LORD BELVOIR'S *room is laid for a small dinner-party. The room seems empty. Presently the door opens and* NOSEGAY *ushers in* SIR PHILO *and* LADY PHAORON: SIR PHILO *is in his diving dress, with helmet and trumpet.*]

LADY PHAORON. Thank God he's discovered an antidote. Now you'll be able to get rid of that ridiculous affair, and lead a decent life.

SIR PHILO [*through his trumpet*]. What's that you say, my dear?

LADY PHAORON. For God's sake pull yourself together! You're not deaf yet, are you?

SIR PHILO. No, but your voice reverberates so, my dear, in this helmet—you have no idea.

LADY PHAORON. I said thank God he's found an antidote, so that you'll be able to walk about like a civilized human being again.

SIR PHILO. Civilized?

LADY PHAORON. You heard quite well what I said.

SIR PHILO. I don't want to be civilized. You wouldn't have thought Thotmes III civilized.

LADY PHAORON. You're not Thotmes III. You're a Georgian knight.

SIR PHILO. A what?

LADY PHAORON [*exasperated*]. A Georgian knight, you fool!

SIR PHILO [*shouting*]. What's a Georgian knight, you fool?

LADY PHAORON. God knows why I married you!

SIR PHILO. God knows what? What does God know?

[LADY PHAORON *gives him up and sits down with a resigned shrug. She helps herself to one of* LORD BELVOIR'S *cigars. They sit without speaking.* SIR PHILO, *who is usually brisk and talkative, is huddled up in a dejected mass of tubes and gadgets with his trumpet dangling forlornly upon his breast. Presently the door opens and* NOSEGAY *ushers in* SIR SOLOMON *and the* LADY OLIVIA *and* MURIEL.]

SIR SOLOMON. How d'ye do, Lady Phaoron? [*Louder*] Well, Philo, this is a most fortunate affair. Aren't you looking forward to getting out of that rig-out?

[SIR PHILO *shakes hands spiritlessly and mumbles something unintelligible inside his helmet.*]

LADY PHAORON. Of course he is; it's a godsend!

SIR PHILO [*shouting through his trumpet*]. I'm sick of God and what He sends.

LADY PHAORON [*loudly*]. There's no call for blasphemy. I thought you couldn't hear unless one shouted.

SIR PHILO [*shouting*]. I didn't hear. I guessed.

THE LADY OLIVIA. I'm sure you must be delighted, Sir Philo. It must have been awful for you these last three months.

LADY PHAORON. Awful! It's been positively ghastly! We've been nowhere; we've seen no

one, and, what with shouting and being shouted at, my nerves are all in pieces.

SIR PHILO [*to the* LADY OLIVIA]. I've had a delightful time, the best time of my life.

[*Re-enter* NOSEGAY *with another manservant carrying tray with small covered soup cups.*]

NOSEGAY. Will you please to be seated? His lordship has instructed me to ask you to begin; he has just telephoned and will be here presently. He was very particular that you should on no account wait.

SIR SOLOMON [*to* NOSEGAY *as they seat themselves where indicated*]. Where's the antidote? Sir Philo Phaoron won't be able to eat until he has it.

NOSEGAY [*as he serves the soup*]. I don't know, sir. Perhaps Lord Belvoir will bring it with him.

LADY PHAORON. Philo, you're leaking!

SIR SOLOMON [*who is in a good humour*]. Screw up your helmet. This is excellent soup, Philo. It has a most delicious flavour. What is it, Nosegay? I've never tasted it before.

NOSEGAY. It's a new recipe, sir; we've never had it before.

SIR SOLOMON. You must get Belvoir to give it to you, Olivia; don't you think it's quite remarkable?

THE LADY OLIVIA. It is excellent.

[*They all eat the soup except* SIR PHILO.]

SIR SOLOMON [*shouting jovially to* SIR PHILO]. Can't you put one of those tubes in the soup?

THE LADY OLIVIA. You'll soon be able to enjoy a dinner-party again. I'm surprised you're not more excited about it. [*The soup is cleared away.* NOSEGAY *and the waiter go out.*]

SIR PHILO. I think people should eat alone. I don't know whatever Belvoir wanted to find an antidote for. I was perfectly happy.

MURIEL. Well, you ask him. Here he is.

[*The door opens and* LORD BELVOIR *enters.*]

LORD BELVOIR. Good evening! How d'ye do, Lady Olivia. [*He shakes hands with her and* LADY PHAORON *and bows to* MURIEL.] I must apologise for asking you to sit down to dinner without me, but it was unavoidable.

SIR SOLOMON. Congratulations, Belvoir. It's a most wonderful bit of fortune. How did it happen?

LORD BELVOIR. I suppose you all notice that I've absolutely recovered.

SIR SOLOMON. Absolutely. [*The rest nod.*]

LORD BELVOIR. You can . . . smell nothing?

SIR SOLOMON. Nothing! It's wonderful!

LORD BELVOIR. You don't seem very pleased, Sir Philo.

SIR SOLOMON. You know, I don't believe he wants to take the antidote; he likes going about in that fantastic get-up.

LADY PHAORON. Ridiculous! he must take it. Make him take it at once, Lord Belvoir.

SIR PHILO [*lugubriously*]. If there's an antidote I suppose I shall have to take it. There's no point in going about like this if you can cure yourself any minute. You'd simply be a fraud, and no one would take any interest in you.

LORD BELVOIR [*quietly, but very distinctly*]. Well, Sir Philo, allow me to tell you that you are cured already. [*They all gasp in astonishment*] I mean what I say! Take off that suit, and prove it.

[SIR SOLOMON *helps him off with his helmet.*]

LADY PHAORON [*going up and sniffing* SIR PHILO]. Cured! Oh, how can I thank you, my dear Lord Belvoir?

[MURIEL, *who has been silently watching, suddenly changes colour, as the truth of the situation bursts upon her.*]

MURIEL [*starting forward*]. My God, he's tricked us!

SIR SOLOMON [*turning white*]. What do you mean?

THE LADY OLIVIA [*shocked*]. Muriel!

MURIEL. Can't you see why we can't smell him, and why we aren't able to smell Sir Philo? He's given us the popomack in the soup!

SIR SOLOMON. My God!

SIR PHILO [*dancing excitedly, his head bare*]. Hurray! Hurray!

SIR SOLOMON. Shut up, you blithering buffoon! [*To* LORD BELVOIR, *who is standing calm but pale*] Is this true?

LORD BELVOIR [*deliberately*]. Yes, everyone of us in this room stinks worse than a skunk, and, like the skunk, we alone are unconscious of it.

LADY PHAORON [*as it slowly dawns on her*]. My God! [*She reels backward into a chair, half fainting.*]

SIR PHILO [*his expression changing from one of extreme joy to one of disappointment and exasperation*]. What! she smells too now?

LORD BELVOIR [*grimly*]. Yes; you'll have to get another diving-suit for her.

SIR PHILO [*beaming, as this new aspect dawns upon him*]. Of course! Splendid! We'll never be able to hear each other again!

LADY PHAORON [*blubbering*]. I'll not wear one of those horrid things! I think it's wicked of you, Lord Belvoir, wicked! What have I done to deserve such treatment? I'd rather die than go about like that. [*She weeps.*]

SIR PHILO [*jumping excitedly about*]. Splendid! Splendid! Belvoir, you're a marvel! She's human at last!

SIR SOLOMON [*violently*]. Do stop this idiotic jabber. You'll drive me mad! Belvoir, I think you're a scoundrel!

LORD BELVOIR [*coldly*]. Pardon me. I ate the popomack at your house; you have now eaten it at mine. That is all.

SIR SOLOMON [*hotly*]. But I did not premeditate it. I acted in ignorance; it was a pure accident.

LORD BELVOIR. And it is now a pure accident that you have eaten it here. The accident that Muriel no longer loves me. [*Pause.*] But I love her and no one else is going to have her.

MURIEL [*passionately*]. Do you think I'd have anything to do with you now? I'd rather die!

LORD BELVOIR [*grimly*]. It is easy to say that, but wait until you have had months of isolation as I have had, months without speaking to anyone except through a telephone, and then you'll change your mind.

MURIEL [*gloomily*]. Do you think that matters? Do you think you've got me even if I am forced to live with you because there's no one else in all this world to live with? [*She clenches her hands*] No one else in all this world!

LORD BELVOIR [*bitterly*]. Yes, imagine that yesterday you had the whole world to live with! What is this wonderful world? A mass of squirming reptiles walking on their hind legs! There is not a single man in this universe whom you could put in my place at this moment, and say truly that you would be prepared to abandon everything for him. You cannot forgive *me* this trick, but there is no one, *no one* you could forgive, and there never will be!

MURIEL. I hate the sight of you!

LORD BELVOIR. Perhaps I also hate you. I cannot think that love would act like this. But this

way I shall win you, and if I had really loved you I should have lost you.

MURIEL. Oh how I hate this talk about love! I don't want to love, I want to live!

LORD BELVOIR. Well, you shall live with me.

MURIEL. You will wish you were dead. Yes, perhaps I shall live with you, a vile, hateful life because neither of us is free, bound to each other by a hunger as ruthless as the need for food, yet only a partial hunger, a hunger in which only a fragment of us takes part, dragging the rest of us with it. Why couldn't you let me go, and wait?

LORD BELVOIR. Wait! I've waited for thirty years, and now I should wait for ever, for I should meet no one. Better have you than nothing.

MURIEL. You are wrong. This way you are not getting me! You are getting nothing that would satisfy a *man!* You are no better than a dog or a monkey!

LORD BELVOIR. I am a monkey, an enlarged and more intelligent monkey. We are all monkeys!

MURIEL [*looking at him steadily*]. Now I know why I couldn't love you. I never could understand it, but now I know.

LORD BELVOIR. I suppose you think you are perfect, you think you could fall in love with nothing less than a god. I am not so ambitious.

MURIEL [*scornfully*]. You! Anyone would do for

you. You'd fall into the first woman's arms who would take pity on you.

LORD BELVOIR. You underrate yourself. Do you think I would have taken this trouble for anybody?

MURIEL. Oh, no doubt you have a good taste in clothes.

LORD BELVOIR [*intensely*]. Do you know you are extraordinarily beautiful?

MURIEL. Oh, you'd be a judge of that too!

LORD BELVOIR [*passionately*]. Muriel, I love you. Before your beauty God would tremble. I cannot live without you.

MURIEL. That is another reason why I do not love you. I can love no man who wants to find his life in me.

LORD BELVOIR [*gloomily*]. I should find no life in you, but you would be something.

MURIEL. I don't want to be something. I want to be everything and nothing.

SIR SOLOMON [*grimly*]. Well, Belvoir, you've got the best of us and Muriel too, for she'll never be able to marry anyone else unless she does the same as you've done, and—[*the idea suddenly striking him*] why shouldn't we? Have you any of that popomack left?

LORD BELVOIR [*gloomily*]. I don't know. I expect so.

SIR SOLOMON [*rubbing his hands*]. But, of course, that's the thing to do. Why, it will solve all

our difficulties. I'll invite everyone I know; we'll have a regular banquet. By God! all my enemies and all my friends too. There are dozens of people who'd sell their souls to be asked to dinner by us. Well, they shall all come! Ha! Ha! [*He laughs fiendishly.*]

SIR PHILO [*almost whining*]. And what'll become of me when everyone's eaten the popomack? [*No one takes any notice of him and he goes on mumbling disconsolately.*]

SIR SOLOMON. Well, Muriel, you won't need to marry our friend Belvoir, after all. You can invite the man you want.

MURIEL. Oh, you are all loathsome! I shall invite no one!

LORD BELVOIR [*to* SIR SOLOMON]. You seem to take it for granted that I am going to give you the popomack.

SIR SOLOMON [*craftily*]. Why should you refuse? The more people there are who have eaten it the better for all of us.

LORD BELVOIR [*uneasily, evidently wrestling with himself*]. And I shall lose Muriel, I know the craftiness of women. She won't invite the man she wants, but he'll be there, oh yes, he'll be there! [MURIEL *says nothing, but throws one profound look at him. He continues, turning to* MURIEL] You think I am weak because I need you so badly, but I tell you you are wrong. I cannot live without your beauty. I cannot live

without *you*, divine spirit that you are. For there is no one who knows how beautiful you are, no one but me; no one who will watch you fade day by day upon the air with such passion and such pity. I want to possess you, for you are me. I want to find myself, for you are myself. No one will know you; you will go about the earth unrecognised, but I know you. And because you are imperishable, and because no man will find you, I will let you go free.

[*The scene slowly fades. When it is light again,* LORD BELVOIR *is seen seated in his chair with his book on his knee exactly as he sat down after speaking on the telephone to* MURIEL. *His eyes are closed, but it is impossible to tell whether he is asleep. There is silence. Presently a clock is heard striking.* LORD BELVOIR *opens his eyes, and, surprised, gazes round the room. He gets up and walks thoughtfully across to the bell, which he rings.* NOSEGAY *enters.*]

LORD BELVOIR. Has a Captain Anthony been here, Nosegay?

NOSEGAY [*puzzled*]. No one of that name that I know of, my lord.

LORD BELVOIR [*putting his hand to his head*]. Has no one been here, not Sir Solomon and Miss Raub?

NOSEGAY. No one, my lord. [LORD BELVOIR *walks away thoughtfully.*] Is there anything else?

LORD BELVOIR. No, very well. [NOSEGAY *goes out.*] Extraordinary! [*He looks at his watch. He walks*

to the telephone. He takes off the receiver eagerly in obvious uneasiness.] Mayfair 2713! Hullo! Is that Mayfair 2713? I want to speak to Miss Raub, please. Hullo! Is that you, Muriel, back safely? . . . Who brought you home? . . . Tell me what was it you wanted to say to me? What! You're going to marry Clavelly! But, Muriel, you're engaged to me! . . . Muriel! . . . I don't understand . . . [*He drops the receiver and walks into the centre of the room.*] I can do nothing, nothing! . . . (*He walks about the room, stands a moment in reflection and then crosses to the bell and rings it.*]

[NOSEGAY *enters.*]

NOSEGAY [*after standing for a moment*]. You rang for me, my lord.

LORD BELVOIR. Go and buy me a cheap revolver.

NOSEGAY [*surprised*]. But I can't get one at this hour, my lord.

LORD BELVOIR. What's that? Oh, of course not! Never mind, in the morning will do. [NOSEGAY *goes out.*]

[*The lights fade and go up again on the two* YOUNG MEN, *sitting gazing as if in a trance straight before them.*]

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*slowly moving and looking round with a shudder*]. Did you see?

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*whispering*]. Yes. My God, how awful! So that was how it happened. But did I really see it, or have you been telling it to

me so vividly that I imagined it all happening as you spoke?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. But how did I know it? Did I imagine it? I wonder!

FIRST YOUNG MAN. I don't understand at the end Belvoir's waking up and finding no Captain Anthony had ever called and that there had been no dinner party.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Well, you see, it's quite simple. Belvoir had been advertising for a popomack, and Muriel had promised to take it when they got it and then marry him; but they have been advertising for some time without success, and Belvoir has been getting more and more depressed as he never sees Muriel, and he hears of her going about everywhere with other men, so that when she tells him to ring her up when she gets back home as she has something important to say, it makes him at once uneasy and works on his mind subconsciously to such an extent that when he falls asleep in his chair he starts dreaming. When he wakes and discovers it is a dream and telephones Muriel he finds that his fear that he had lost her, which was the root of his dream, has proved correct.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. But why did he shoot himself before that picture?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Do you remember the couple in the gallery that day we saw that picture?

FIRST YOUNG MAN. I remember there was a couple sitting down.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Yes, it was Belvoir and Miss Raub, and that picture had evidently some cherished association for Belvoir.

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*going up to the picture and looking at it*]. I see there's a red paper disc stuck in the corner of the glass. I have often seen it on pictures at shows. What does it mean?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. It means—[*he suddenly bursts into savage laughter, then stops dead and continues with slow emphasis*], it means "*Sold.*"

Curtain

Act II

SCENE II

SCENE. *When the lights go up again the scene is the same as the first scene in Act I, and* LORD BELVOIR *is still sitting in front of the "Portrait of a Balloon." It is about midday. Enter* MURIEL.

MURIEL. Reggie, Reggie! What's the matter with you? You don't mean to say that you have been asleep?

LORD BELVOIR [*sitting up, rather dazed*]. What's that?

MURIEL. Darling! It's come, the popomack has arrived.

LORD BELVOIR [*in a tone of horror and amazement*]. The popomack!

MURIEL. Whatever is the matter with you, Reggie?

LORD BELVOIR [*suddenly seeing the red disc on the "Portrait of a Balloon"*]. Look, it's sold!

MURIEL [*alarmed*]. Reggie! . . . Darling! I bought it for you as I went out.

LORD BELVOIR [*pulling himself together*]. I've had the most awful dream. How long have you been?

MURIEL. Not more than three minutes. I just rang up father and came straight back. Isn't it exciting that the popomack has arrived?

LORD BELVOIR. The popomack. . . .
MURIEL. Yes, from China.
LORD BELVOIR. From China?
MURIEL. Yes, we shall be the first Europeans to taste it. Isn't it thrilling? Of course, it may be horrible. Will you care to eat it?
LORD BELVOIR [*suddenly cheerful*]. We shall eat it together, darling, mouthful by mouthful. We shall begin together and stop together . . . absolutely simultaneously.
MURIEL [*gaily*]. How comic!
LORD BELVOIR [*suddenly looking at her silently for a moment*]. Yes, how comic!
MURIEL. Darling, you're absurd. You've had too many late nights. Now let's go and have lunch, and you can tell me your dream.
LORD BELVOIR [*stopping*]. Tell you my dream?
MURIEL. Yes.
LORD BELVOIR. Never!
MURIEL. Then you don't love me?
LORD BELVOIR [*slowly and reflectively*]. I dreamed that we ate the popomack together.
MURIEL. And then?
LORD BELVOIR [*stepping backward and looking at her as if for the first time in his life*]. And then that we loved each other for ever and ever.

Curtain

THE END

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